

Thrilling DETECTIVE ADVENTURES™

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty



IN THIS ISSUE!
THE INCREDIBLE
ORIGIN OF
THE **SCYTHER**™



Plus™

FAMOUS DETECTIVE PIN-UP
BY FRANK MILLER!

and

THE **MIKE MIST**™

MINUTE
MIST-ERIES

WOMEN

AND THE COMICS

by **TRINA ROBBINS AND CATHERINE YRONWODE**



© Wendy Pini



Ethel Hays



© Rose O'Neill

This is the **DEFINITIVE** book about women and the comics, written and edited by the two leading authorities in the field. Trina Robbins and Catherine Yronwode have spent three years doing research — interviewing female comics creators, uncovering rare newspaper and comic

book art, and compiling this informative and heavily illustrated book that finally gives due credit to the many, many women who've worked in comics for the last 80 years!

From the early days of newspaper strips, to the exciting "jungle girl" artists of the 1940s, on through Wendy Pini, Marie Severin and Duursema, this book also presents for the first time anywhere, a

checklist of all women known to have created comics! A must-have book for all comics lovers.



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Mr

TREE

"DEATH DO US PART"

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

Colored by Petra Goldberg

Chapter
Four

GOING DOWN

©1983
Max Collins
and
Terry Beatty

I DIDN'T KNOW IT
AT THE TIME...

BUT SOMEWHERE WITHIN MY BUILDING...



AN "ACTOR" WAS PREPARING FOR HIS NEXT
PERFORMANCE — DIFFERENT COSTUME,
SAME ROLE.





MR. MUERTA - I ADMIT HAVING A CERTAIN PERSONAL INTEREST IN THIS CASE, HAVING BEEN ON THE SCENE...



AND HAVING SURVIVED A VIOLENT HONEY-MOON OF YOUR OWN - IF YOU'LL FORGIVE MY MENTIONING WHAT IS I'M SURE A SENSITIVE SUBJECT.



WHAT MAKES YOU THINK CAPTAIN MEYERS WON'T FIND THE KILLER HIMSELF?



"WE BOTH KNOW THAT THE MAN TECHNICALLY RESPONSIBLE IS A PROFESSIONAL," FRANCESCO MUERTA SAID.



I WANT HIM, OF COURSE - BUT I WANT WHOEVER HIRED HIM MORE. CAPTAIN MEYERS, GOOD MAN THOUGH HE SEEMS TO BE, COULD NEVER GET THAT FAR.



BECAUSE THIS IS A MOB KILLING? IS THAT THE LINE YOU WANT ME TO READ BETWEEN?



I'M NOT INVOLVED WITH THE MOB, MS. TREE. BUT MY BROTHER IS. I FEAR MY DAUGHTER MAY BE AN INNOCENT BYSTANDER MADE GUILTY BY BLOOD - MUERTA BLOOD.

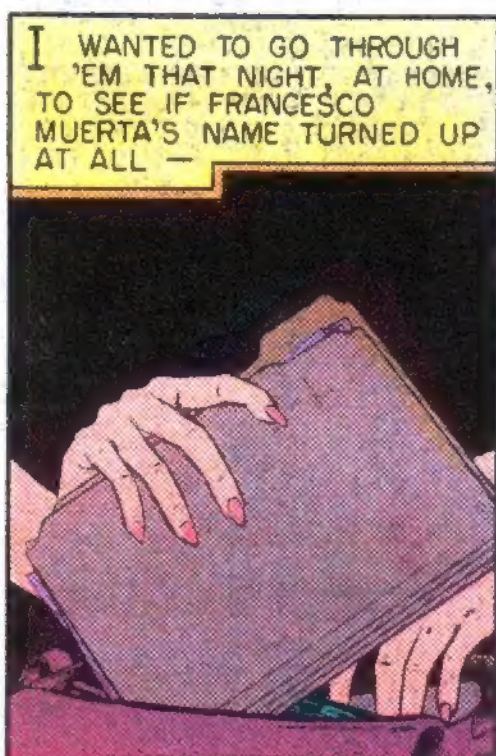
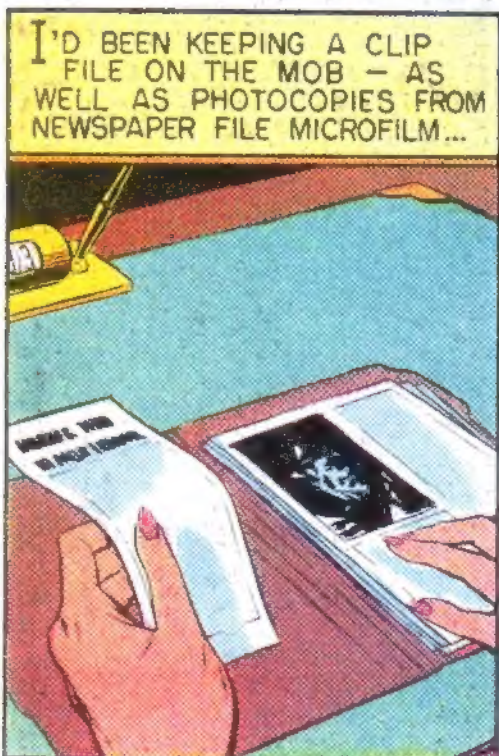


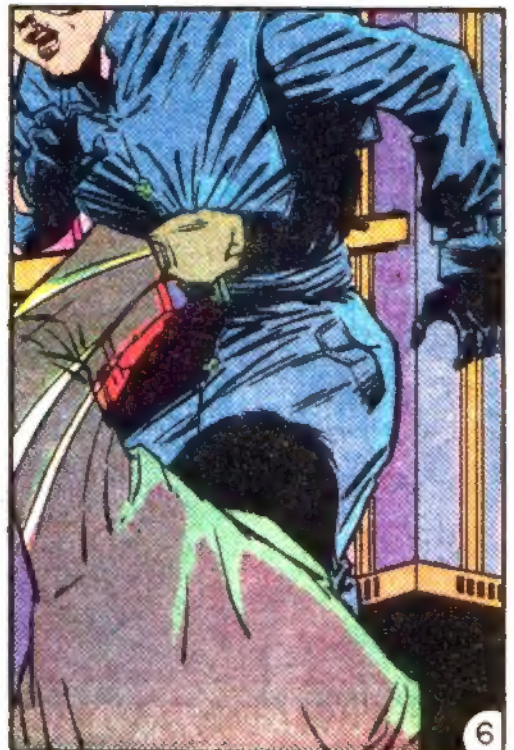
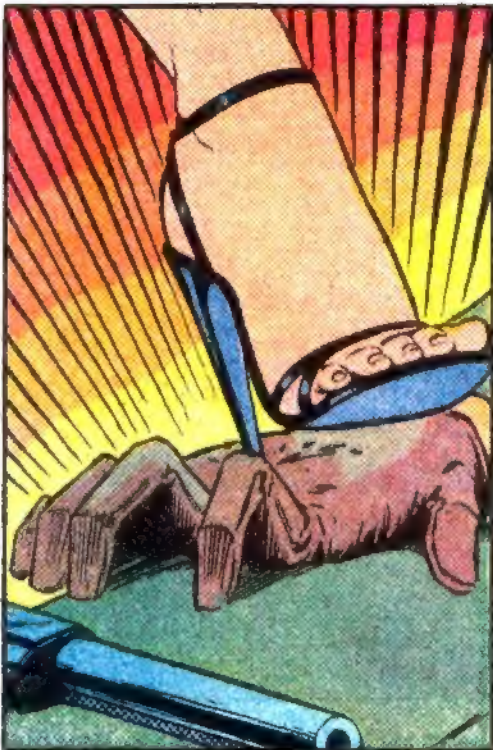
THEN WHY NOT ASK YOUR BROTHER TO FIND OUT WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR HER MURDER?

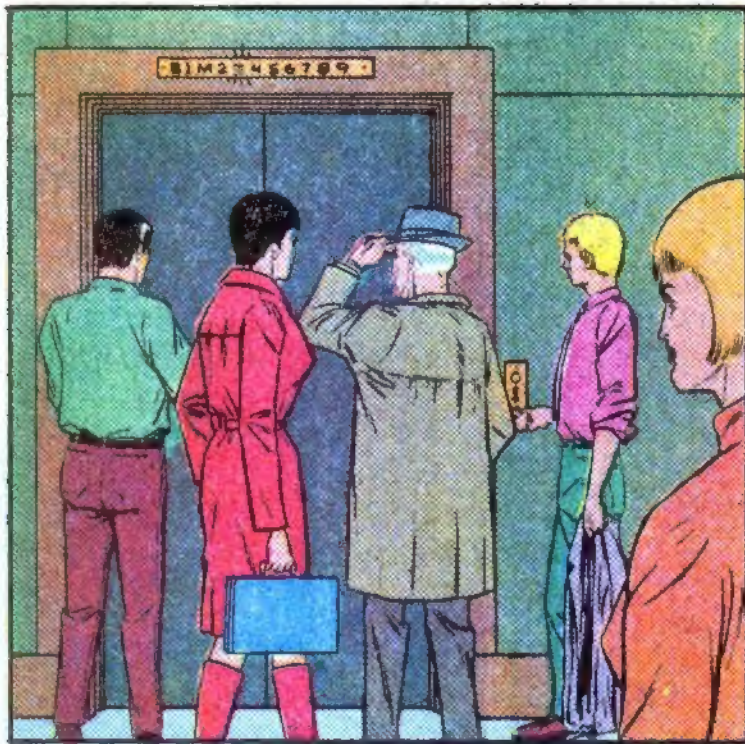
BECAUSE HE MAY BE RESPONSIBLE.

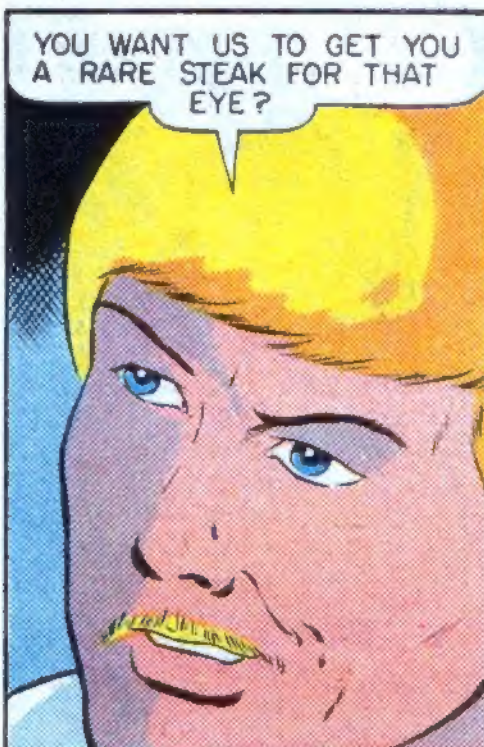














Please send your letters to:
SWAK
 Eclipse Comics
 105 Austin Avenue
 Columbia, MO 65201

Dear Max and Terry,

I picked up a stack of new comics recently to catch up on what's happening. Reading them was hard work until I came to **Ms. Tree**.

I hope your simple layouts, clearly composed panels, and good story-telling influence other cartoonists and that you are rewarded with the success you've earned the right to.

LEONARD RIFAS, San Francisco, CA
 Cartoonist Leonard Rifas is the guiding force behind *Educomics*, whose latest publication, Keiji Nakazawa's **I Saw It** (\$2 plus \$1, *Educomics*, Box 40246, San Francisco, CA 94140) is highly recommended. Nakazawa's masterpiece, **Barefoot Gen**, is also available in two **thick** volumes from *Educomics* at \$6 each, an incredible bargain for some of the most vivid, moving, beautifully-told comics ever.

Dear SWAK,

Ms. Tree's transition from the **Eclipse** series into her own comic book is a smashing success—albeit “long overdue.”

I gotta tell you how pleased I was to find 24 full color pages of my favorite blood 'n' guts female in the flesh in #1. The color looks real good, creating stark, surreal tones for Ms. Tree's fateful beach scenes.

I have a feeling that Caniff, Ditko, EC comics and *Undergrounds* figured prominently in Beatty's formative years. Ms. Tree is a classic doll—based on a real film fox, right? After the EC feeling subsides, the book enjoys a look of simple cartooning styles which have been overlooked by too many “fans.”

Collins' “experiment in coherence” succeeds on many levels; the mystery, the avenging woman, Ms. Tree's psychodrama and the sportive love story all weave an interesting, often striking narrative. I enjoyed the Spillane and literary references and the tough characters.

BARRY LUEBBERT, Los Gatos, CA
 Barry, *Ms. Tree* is physically patterned after a movie “god-dess”—the young Lana Turner (few readers have spotted this, because of the blonde/brunette difference).

Dear SWAK!-

Glad to finally see Ms. Tree in her own magazine. It's nice to see a comic with an adult theme, as well as a P.I. theme, which is a welcome change from the usual superhero fare. The Private Eye Writers of America are proud of Collins & Beatty—both whom are members of PWA—for this innovation in both the comic and P.I. fields.

The story, although slow to start—and understandably so, since some fill-in was needed between the last chapter in **Eclipse**, and this first chapter of Ms. Tree's own magazine—did pick up pace, and I'll be looking forward to the developments in future issues.

As for a magazine as a whole, I think I'll wait for issue #2, with all the regular features, to comment on that. I will say this, however. The Frank Miller “Famous Detective Pin-Up” is a wonderful tribute to the most recognizable authors & P.I.s in the genre, and Mike Hammer was of course a fitting choice for number one. I hope Ms. Tree lives on for years to come, and maybe someday my own P.I. will qualify for “Famous Pinup” no. 100, or so.

BOB RANDISI, Brooklyn, NY
 Bob Randisi's private eye is Miles Jacoby, whose solid debut (**Eye In The Ring**, Avon) is still on the stands; Bob is the

founder of the writers organization he mentions, the Private Eye Writers of America. He also writes the very successful **Gunsmith** western series, under the name J. R. Roberts.

Dear Max and Terry,

This second Ms. Tree novel—following the six-part “I, for an Eye” which helped launch **Eclipse** to success—is an improvement both in story and visual presentation. The new **Ms. Tree** is in color, much more preferable to me than the black and white of **Eclipse**. While there were some minor errors in the book—misdating **I, the Jury** (on the Frank Miller pin-up) as 1953 instead of 1947 and placing the chapters of the novels so that ending panels were not allowed to build the proper suspense—my overall reaction is one of total enjoyment.

Congratulations to you both and Dean Mullaney for putting out such a quality detective book, a type sorely missing recently and deserving of much success.

JIM TRAYLOR, Smyrna, GA
 Jim, I agree that the three chapters would have been more effective separated by non-Ms. Tree pages (ad copy, **SWAK**, whatever); moving the debut of “The Scythe” to issue #2 necessitated moving Chapter Three of “Ms. Tree” up an issue—hence, the redundant material on the splash of that chapter, appropriate for the next issue, but not the next page. Editor Dean Mullaney wrote the copy for Miller's “Mike Hammer” pin-up, and mistakenly looked in a later edition of **I, the Jury**, so neither Collins nor Miller (Spillane fans both) need cop to the 1947 misdate. (Jim Traylor is a regular contributor to such mystery fanzines as **Armchair Detective** and **The Mystery Fancier**.)

Dear Eclipse,

Prior to the first issue of **Ms. Tree**, the last comic book I read was around the year Max Collins was born. He has done it again—first he got me hooked on his **Nolan** books. I wish there had been 20 in the series rather than 6. Then I was hooked on the 4 books in his **Quarry** series. Then at last, we mystery book fans got his first hardback novel, **The Baby Blue Rip-off**, in January 1983. His next book is not scheduled until June. This can be a long wait for a mystery book fan and collector. He and Terry Beatty have saved the day with **Ms. Tree**.

Thank you, Max and Terry, for **not** making her a “super hero” or “feminist” character. To quote Max's editorial in issue #1, “Ms. Tree is a feminist only in the way any modern intelligent working woman is likely to be.” I am a modern, intelligent (hopefully), working woman and I think Ms. Tree is great. I did not find the pace too slow. I for one am most anxious for the next issue, when she confronts Dominic Muerta.

I have one small criticism. Make your “2-Minute Mystery” a bit more difficult. Any readers of your **NOLAN** and **QUARRY** series should have known the solution immediately as I did.

MRS. ESTELLE M. BLAIR, San Francisco, CA
 Mrs. Blair is obviously a mystery buff, and I'm not surprised she guessed last issue's “Mike Mist”—but it looks like our cliffhanger fooled her! Welcome to comic books, Estelle—Dean Mullaney will be sending you a copy of **John Law**, to introduce you to a newcomer name of Eisner. (By way of

self-promotion: **The Baby Blue Rip-Off**, Walker, \$11.95, should be readily available at mystery book shops, signed copies can be ordered from dealer Robert Weinberg)

Dear Max and Terry,

First, I'm a terminal fan of film noir and detective stories. A typical evening at our house sees Casey reading Nancy Drew, me reading Raymond Chandler, and Steve reading **Finnegan's Wake**. (We're gonna have to do something about that guy!) As an equally ardent Hammett fan, and therefore a lover of everything Maltese, I appreciate the fact that Ms. Tree's secretary is named Effie. And I adore the Spillane-tough style in which Ms. Tree talks. When Patrick asks her what she'll do when she finds the killer's employer, and she answers, "Kill the son of a bitch," thrills run down my spine.

Next, I'm also a hopeless Terry Beatty fan. What can I say about his style . . . I used to think it was Golden Age, but it's not really. It's just not Marvel or D.C. superhero clone style, and it's been so long since I saw a comic where utterly unbelievable costumed jerks weren't punching each other out one every other page that Terry's style LOOKS Golden Age by comparison. I never had any trouble following Ms. Tree in **Eclipse**, but Terry Beatty in color, and all in one book, is even better.

The "Mike Mist 2-Minute Mist ery" was a riot, especially if one happens to know the people being gently satirized. I laughed out loud.

One last thing, Max. Stop feeling you have to deny Ms. Tree is a feminist. Of course she's a feminist! Any woman as intelligent, tough and independent as Michael is certainly a feminist. Didn't you know that feminists can be attractive and like sex?

TRINA ROBBINS, San Francisco, CA

Getting a positive response like this from Trina Robbins—possibly the foremost woman cartoonist of the day—is the highest praise we could hope for (The "Casey" Trina refers to is her daughter; and "Steve" is a fella named

Leialola, some of you may be familiar with) For the less knowledgeable (scholarly Trina is also the co-author of a forthcoming book on women cartoonists), it should be pointed out that **our** Effie is named after Effie Perrine, Sam Spade's secretary. As for last issue's "Mike Mist" being a satire on actual persons, whatever could you be talking about, Trina? By the way, Terry thanks you for **not** capitalizing the word "hopeless"

Dear Terry and Max,

I was really excited to see the first issue of **Ms. Tree's Thrilling Detective Adventures** at my friendly neighborhood comic shop! I immediately added it to my collection of current comics.

I was most impressed by the characterization—rarely has a comic heroine—even in these days of "hero-angst"—actually gone into analysis—at least not while still functioning, as Ms. Tree admirable is.

Good, straight-ahead storytelling. I like the first-person narrative when the narrator is dynamic, as Ms. Tree is. The romance with Patrick seemed to happen a little bit quickly—maybe because of the swift scene changes during the course of a single conversation! Otherwise I liked the pacing very much.

Graphically—I really enjoyed the many close-ups—very cinematic. Small changes of expression can say so much—something I want to use in the process of turning my own sword 'n' sorcery novel into a comics series. Not just "thud and blunder"!

I'm looking forward to seeing how the story comes out—I'm a real mystery fan.

BARB RAUSCH, West Hollywood, CA

A male writing first-person female narration is presumptuous to say the least; so I feel especially gratified (as does Terry) by the positive comments of women like Barb, Estelle and Trina. Talented Barb Rausch, incidentally, is one of the prime movers in the current **KATY KEENE** revival.

—M A C

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THE MIKE MIST

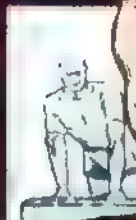
MINUTE MIST-ERY

©1982 by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

DEATH IN THE DEEP END

RICH SIMMIAN and HIS WIFE IVA HAD THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SYNDICATED EXERCISE SHOW ON TV - BUT NOW IVA WAS -

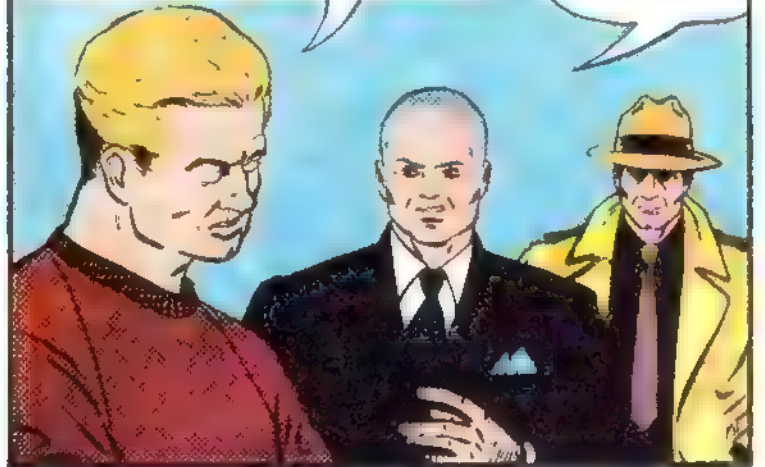
DEAD!



Mike Mist
SOLUTION: EVEN STAGGERING, THE SMALL IVA COULD NEVER LEAVE SUCH DEEP IMPRESSIONS IN THE MERELY DAMP GROUND - AND HER WEIGHT WOULD'VE BEEN FORWARDLY PLACED, NOT ON HER HEELS. AFTER DROWNING HIS WIFE (WHO ENTERED THE HOUSE FROM THE DRIVEWAY) ACROBATIC SIMMIAN WALKED ON HIS HANDS FROM CAR TO POOL, A SPIKE HEEL IN EITHER HAND; PLASTER CASTS OF THE FAKED FOOTPRINTS - AND SIMMIAN'S FINGERPRINTS ON THE SHOES - CONVICTED HIM.

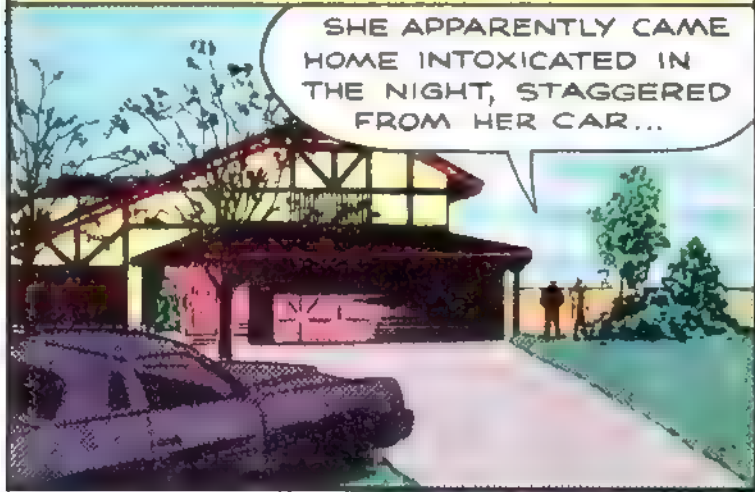
I FOUND HER THIS MORNING - FLOATING IN THE POOL, IN THE DEEP - I PULLED HER OUT, BUT SHE WAS..

TAKE IT EASY, SIMMIAN.

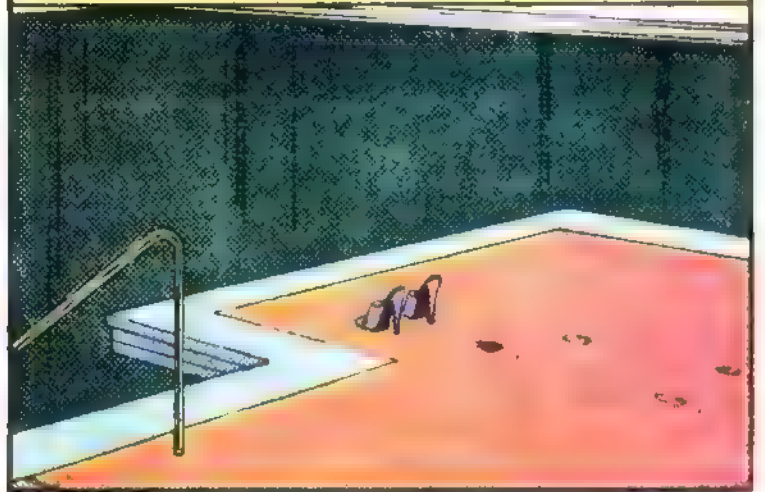


L.T. DIMM HAD ASKED ME ALONG SINCE I WAS ON RETAINER FROM CONTINENTAL INSURANCE, WHOSE POLICY ON IVA WAS WORTH A FORTUNE...

SHE APPARENTLY CAME HOME INTOXICATED IN THE NIGHT, STAGGERED FROM HER CAR...



"AND MADE HER WAY TO THE SWIMMING POOL, STEPPED OUT OF HER HIGH HEELS AND WENT FOR A DRUNKEN SWIM - AND DROWNED."



THESE FOOTPRINTS ARE DEEP - THE SPIKE HEELS DUG IN ESPECIALLY DEEP -

SHE WAS STAGGERING - THE GROUND WAS DAMP FROM THE RAIN, DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY...



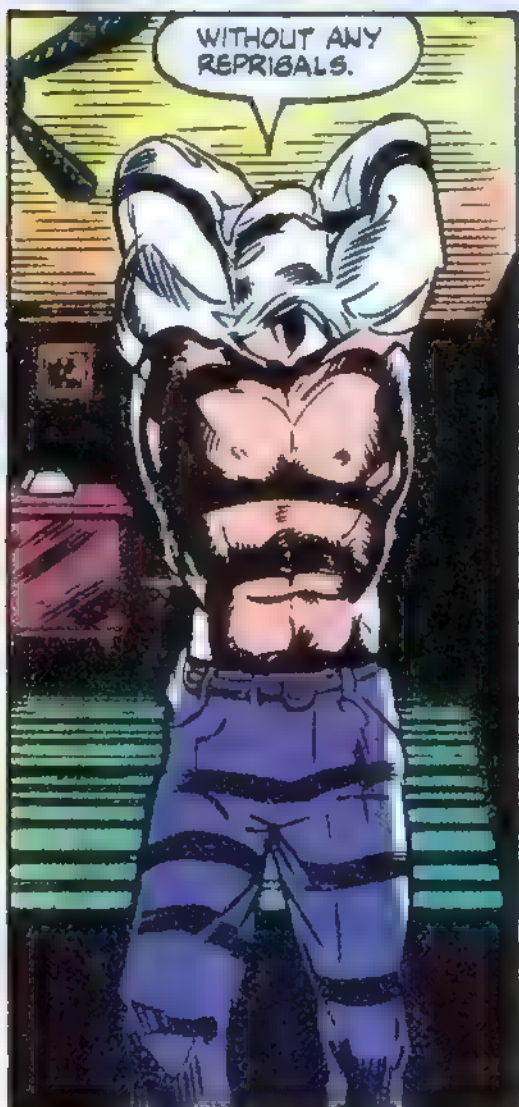
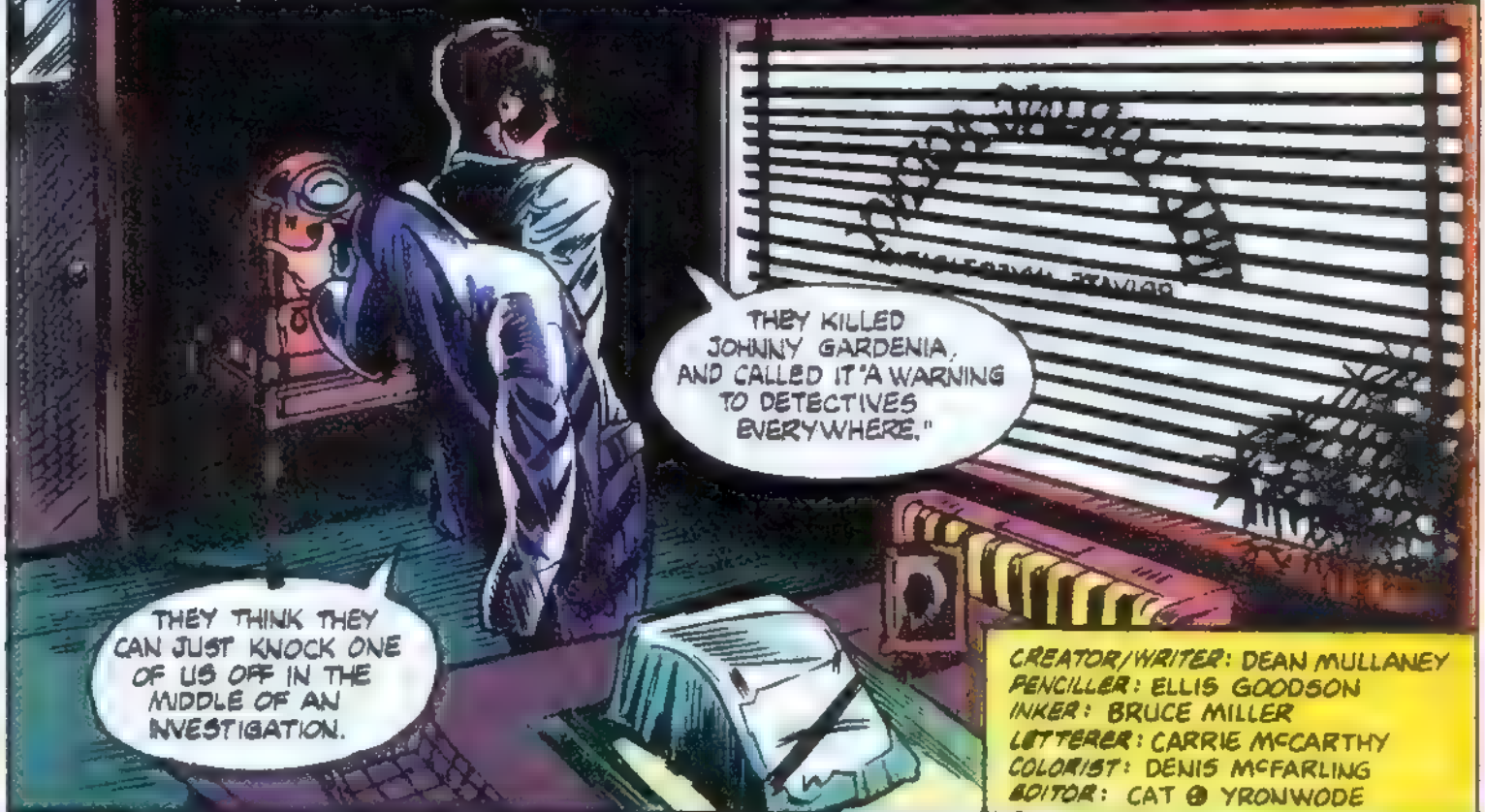
THIS IS CLEARLY ACCIDENTAL DEATH -

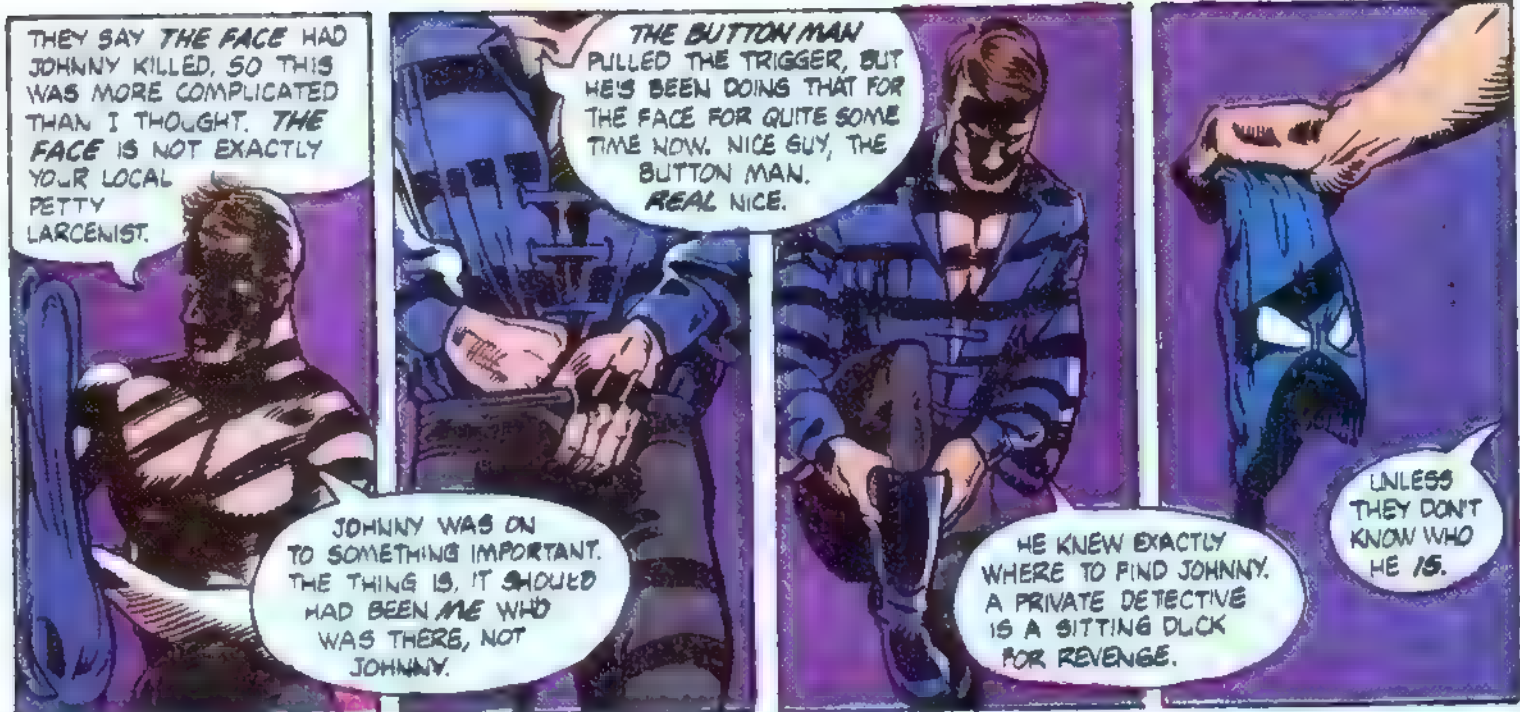
HARDLY. SIMMIAN KILLED HIS WIFE, AND I THINK WE CAN PROVE IT -

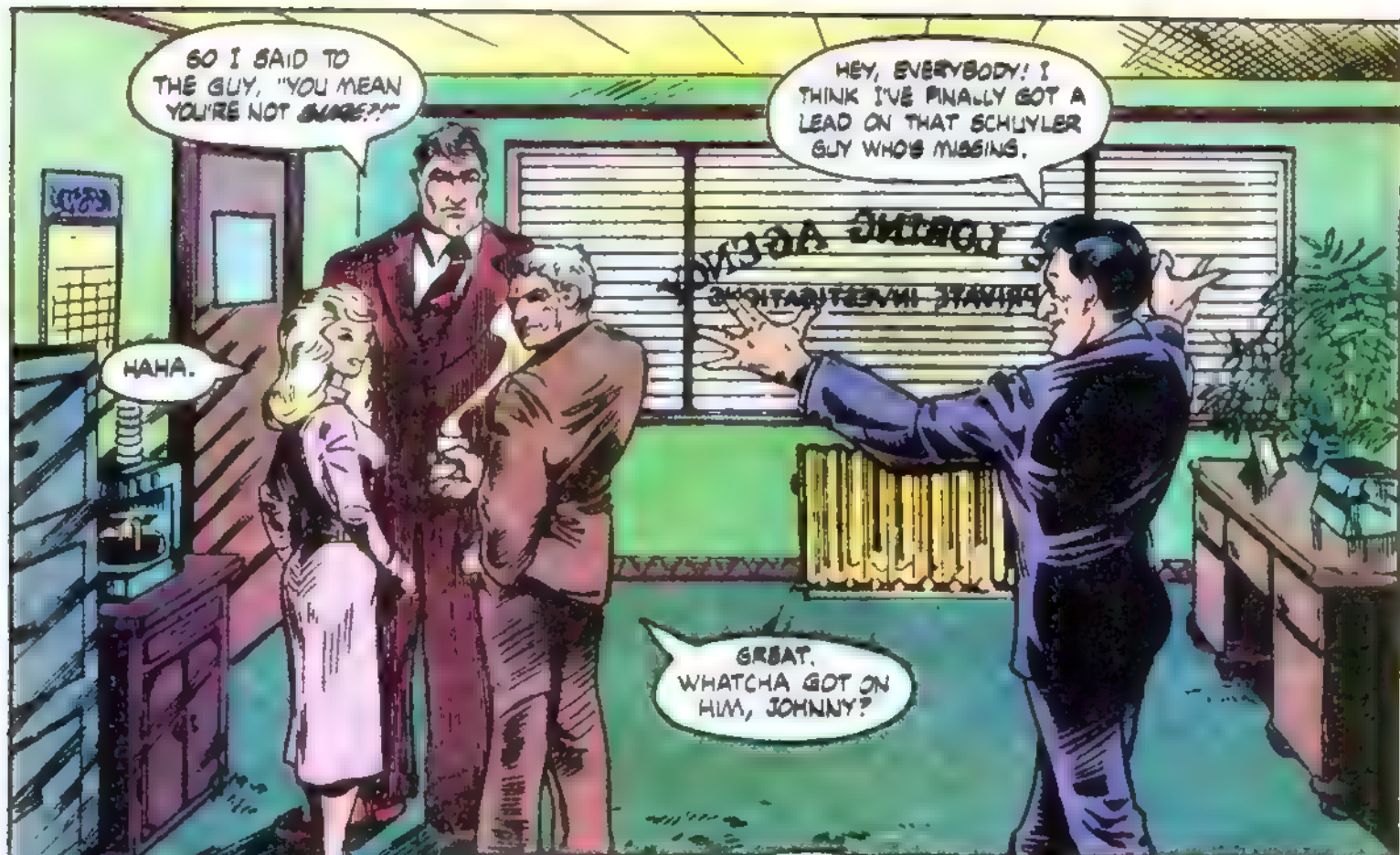


THE SCYTHER

"LOADED PISTOLS & LOADED DICE"







SO I SAID TO THE GUY, "YOU MEAN YOU'RE NOT SURE?"

HEY, EVERYBODY! I THINK I'VE FINALLY GOT A LEAD ON THAT SCHUYLER GUY WHO'S MISSING.

HAHA.

GREAT. WHATCHA GOT ON HIM, JOHNNY?



GOOD MORNING, CHANTILLY.

THE LORAIN
PRIVATE
INVESTIGATION



MORNING? TRY AFTERNOON, ROGER!

BEEN OUT LATE AGAIN, BOSS?

POOR GUY CAN'T KEEP UP WITH THE LADIES, IT SEEMS.

THERE ARE A COUPLE OF THINGS I NEED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT, ROG.

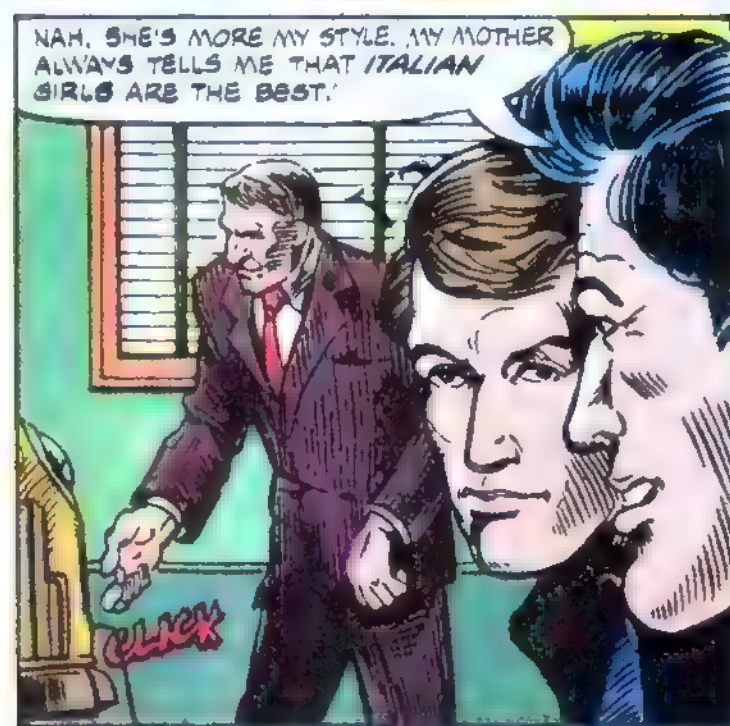
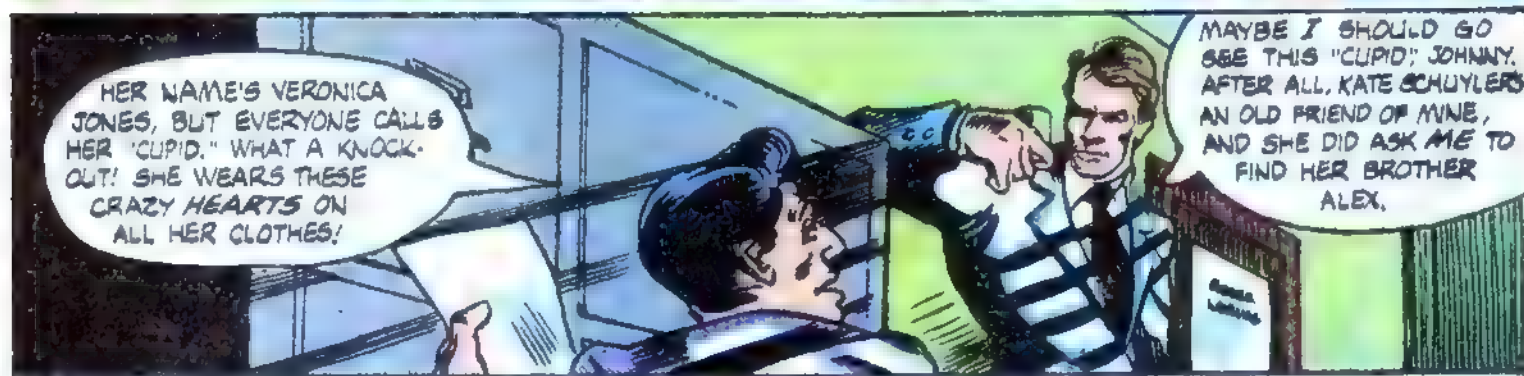
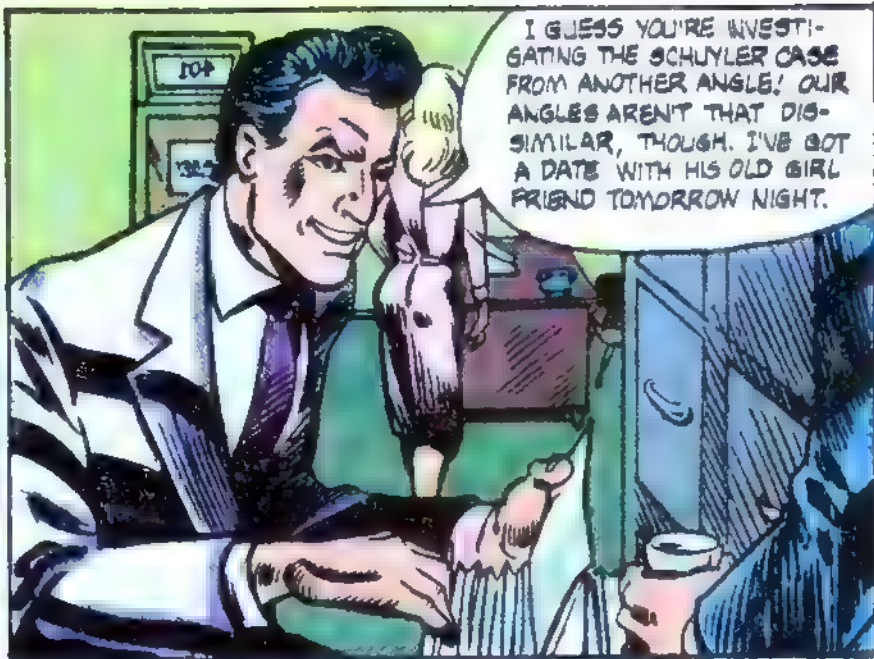
OKAY, MASON. LET ME AT LEAST GET MY COFFEE FIRST!

RING



YOU MAY NOT WANT TO BELIEVE IT, BUT ALL I DID WAS STAY HOME AND PLAY CHESS WITH MYSELF.

I'LL BET.



Frank Miller's "Famous Detective Pin-Up" No. 2

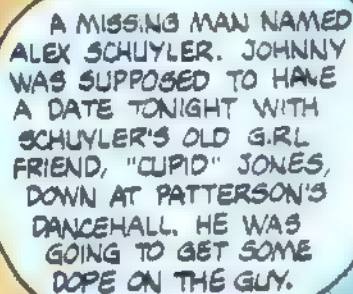
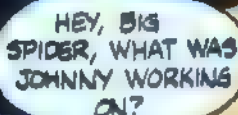
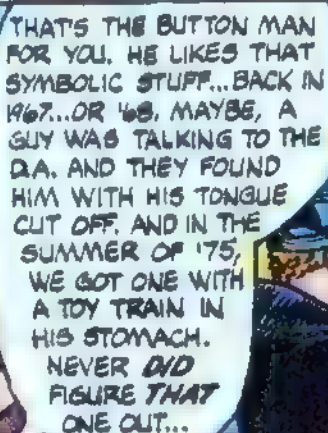
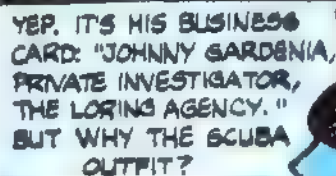
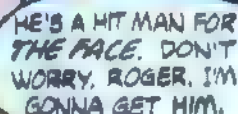
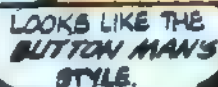
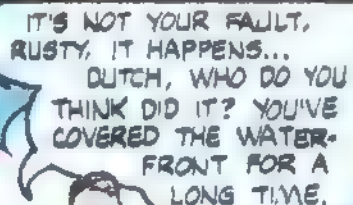
Raymond Chandler's

PHILIP MARLOWE

Philip Marlowe's Los Angeles is not a fragrant world. It is a world of crooked Bay City cops, off-shore gambling boats and rich people's doctors who are quick with the hypodermic. But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid.

Although he appeared in only a handful of short stories and but seven novels (beginning with *The Big Sleep* in 1939), Marlowe has, by most accounts, set the standard by which all other private detectives are measured. No hard-boiled, violence-prone adventurer, this man's story is that of the search for a hidden truth. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. Raymond Chandler, one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century, has given us a hero who is a man of honor in one thing, and in all things.





THREE YEARS AGO, THIS BUILDING WAS CALLED "PIER 41," AND IT HOSTED RATS, FIELD MICE AND BROKEN GLASS. TONIGHT, IT IS CALLED PATTERSON'S DANCEHALL AND IT IS A PLACE WHERE THE UNDERWORLD CAN MEET THE ELITE, WHERE BIG CITY POLITICIANS DANCE CHEEK TO CHEEK WITH CRIMINALS WHO HAVE ENOUGH MONEY, AND INFLUENCE, TO CREATE SUCH A HAVEN.

THE OLD PIER HAS BEEN COMPLETELY REMODELLED, AND WHERE ONCE SWEATING LONGSHOREMEN UNLOADED WOODEN CRATES, GIRL SINGERS NOW WARBLE GERSHWIN TUNES.

BUT THE HARBOR VIEW AND STYLISH MUSIC AREN'T THE ONLY ATTRACTIONS. THE UPPER FLOORS, NOT YET REFURBISHED, OFFER OTHER INVITATIONS...

IT'S HERE THAT DETECTIVE RUSTY BRACES GOES THAT SAME NIGHT...WITH AN ARROW IN HIS SHEATH, AND SOME GOOD SCOTCH IN HIS BELLY...

EXCUSE ME, SIR...

BE RIGHT BACK, BABE...

THE GUN, PLEASE...

STICK IT, CHUM,

IT'S OKAY, VINCENT. DETECTIVE BRACES WON'T BOTHER US, WILL HE?

JUNK.

LET'S SEE... "CUPID." BIG SPIDER BECK SAID HER NAME WAS "CUPID" JONES. OKAY, MISS CUPID JONES... SHOW YOUR MUG SO I CAN BUST IT IN FOR YOU. JOHNNY WOULD LIKE THAT, WOULDN'T YOU, JOHNNY?

ACROSS TOWN...

PRINCE INVESTIGATIONS

IF I'M GUESSING
RIGHT, THE ALEX SCHUYLER
THING BLEW UP IN JOHNNY'S
FACE. THIS HAS TURNED OUT
TO BE MORE THAN A MIS-
SING PERSON'S JOB.

AND THE ONLY CLUE
TO SCHUYLER'S WHEREABOUTS
IS WITH HIS EX-GIRLFRIEND,
VERONICA JONES. AND THE
ONLY CLUE TO JOHNNY'S DEATH
IS THE BUTTON MAN'S
M.O....

LOOKS LIKE PATTERSON'S
IS PRETTY CROWDED TONIGHT...
SHOULDN'T BE TOO DIFFICULT
TO FIND A WOMAN WITH HEARTS
ON ALL HER CLOTHES,
THOUGH.

KRESSH

THE BUTTON MAN'S
ANOTHER STORY. MAYBE HE
AND "CUPID" JONES PLAY TAG
TOGETHER IN THE UPSTAIRS
GAMBLING ROOMS.

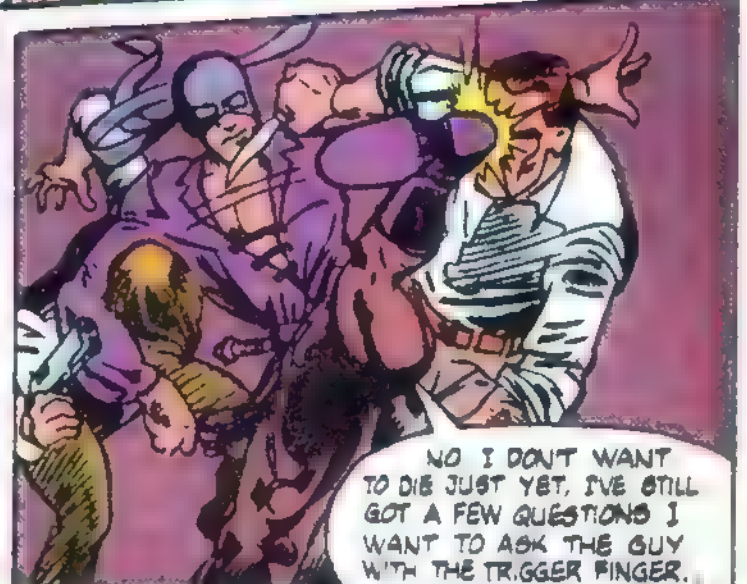
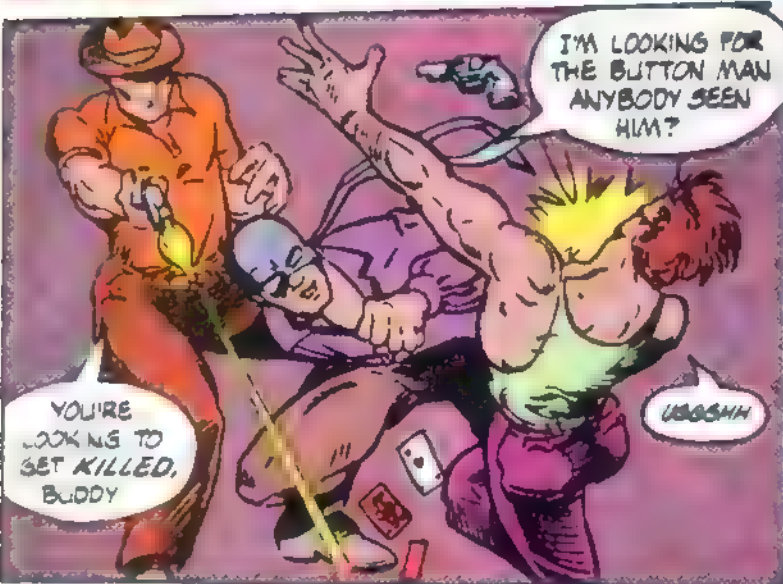
I'LL SEE YOU
THAT AND RAISE
YOU TEN...
JOEY?

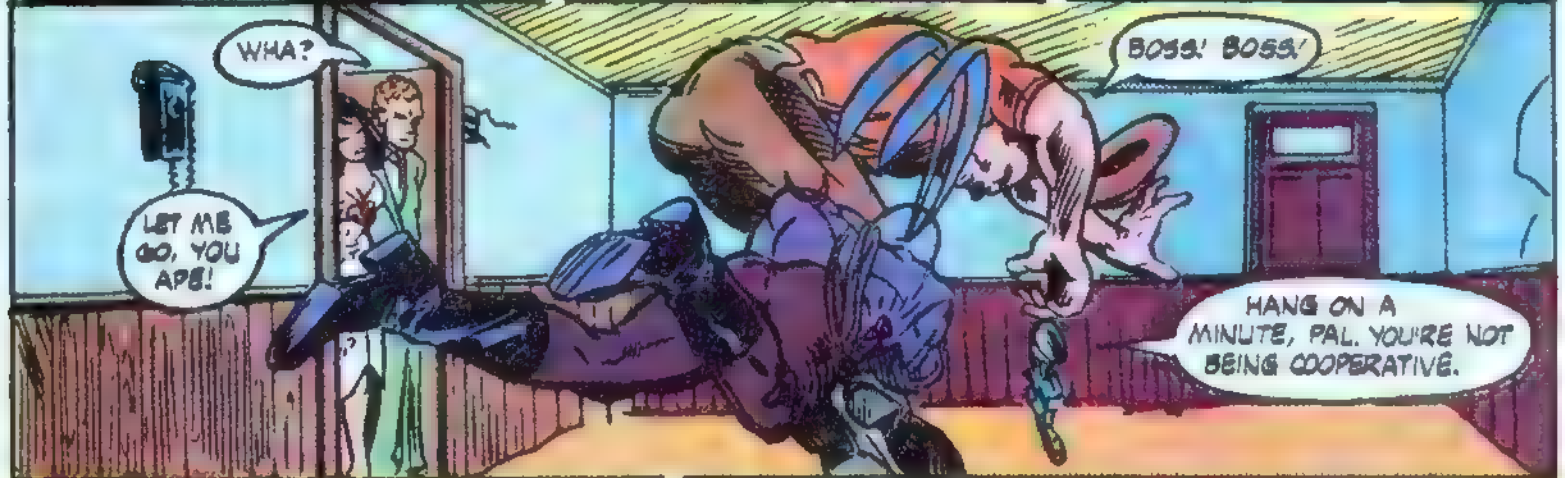
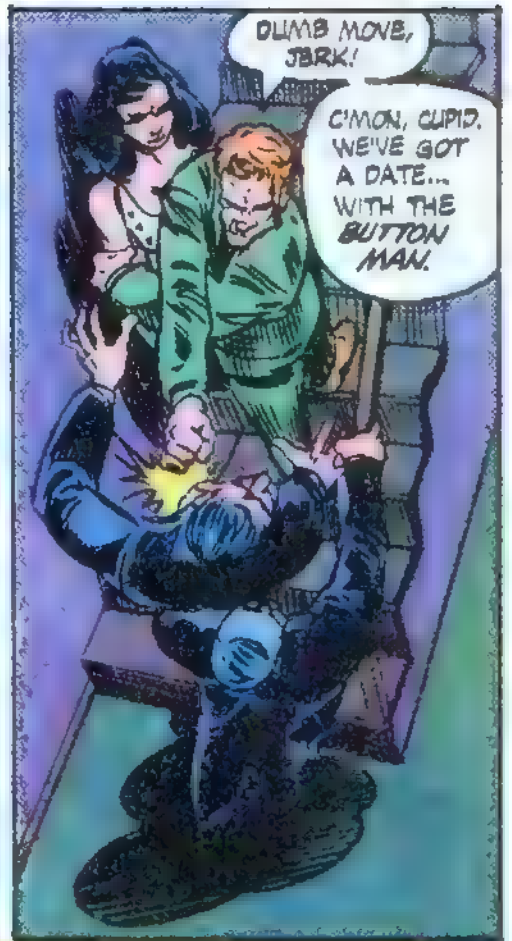
C'MON, JOEY
ANTE UP OR
FOLD.

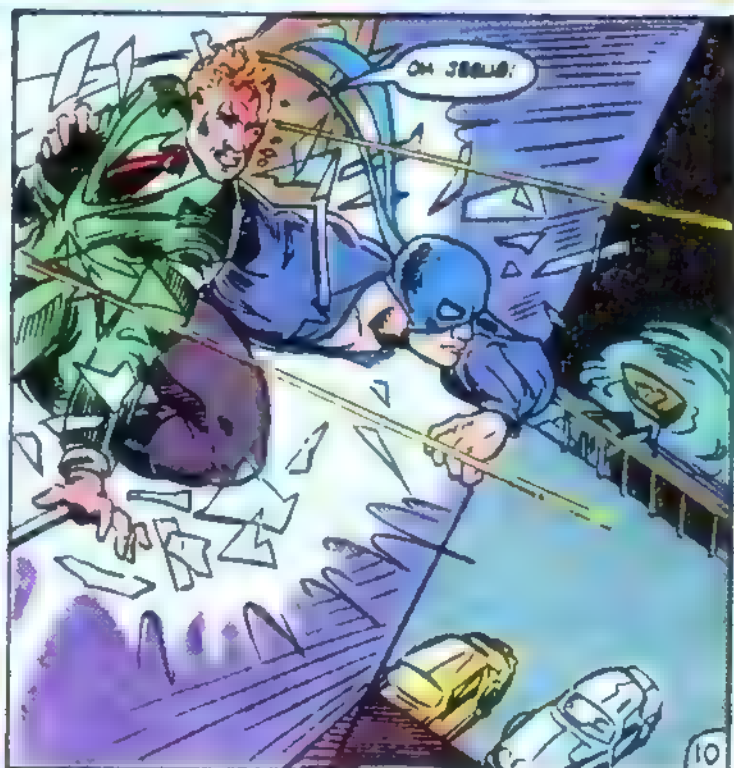
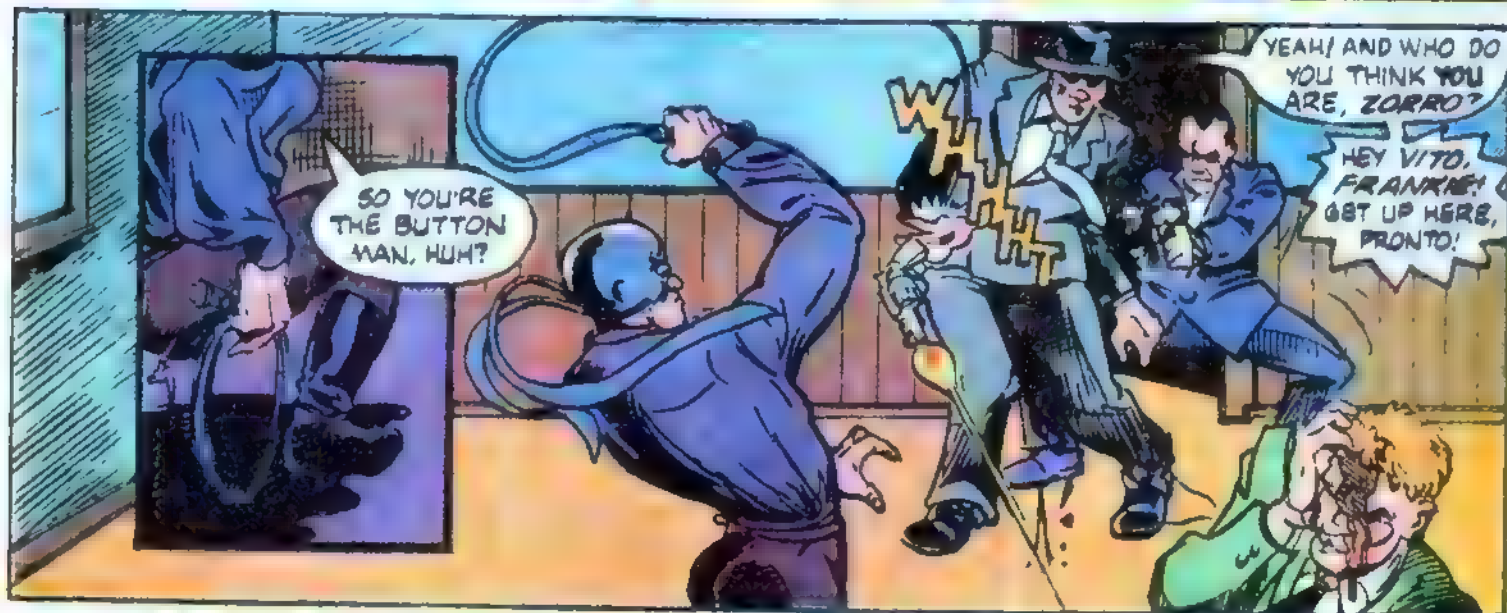
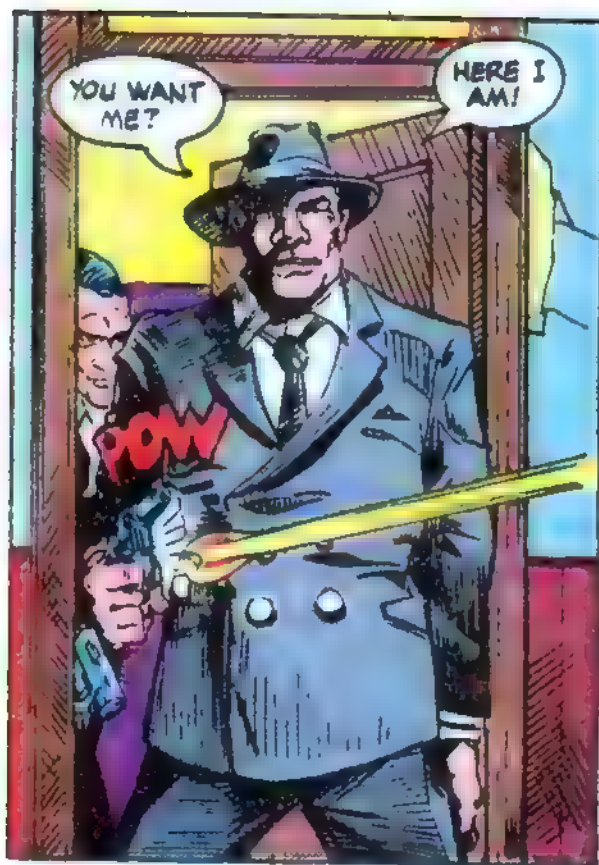
ANYONE UP
FOR A GAME OF
TAG?

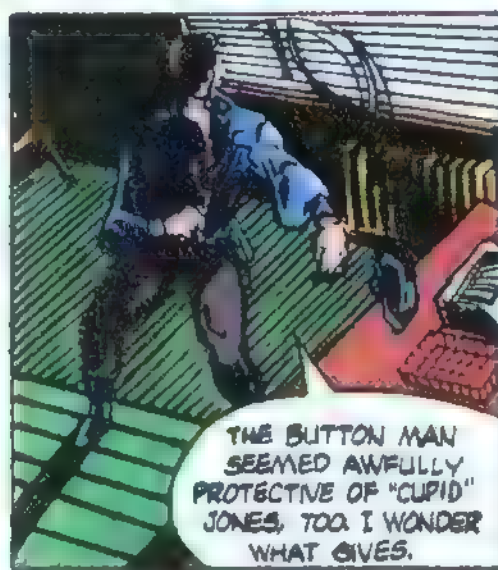
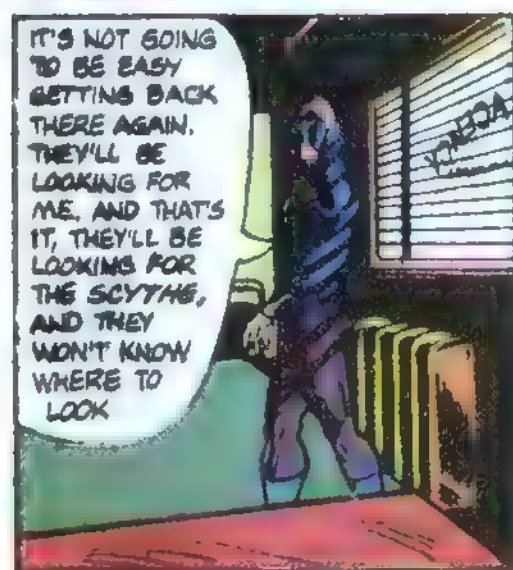
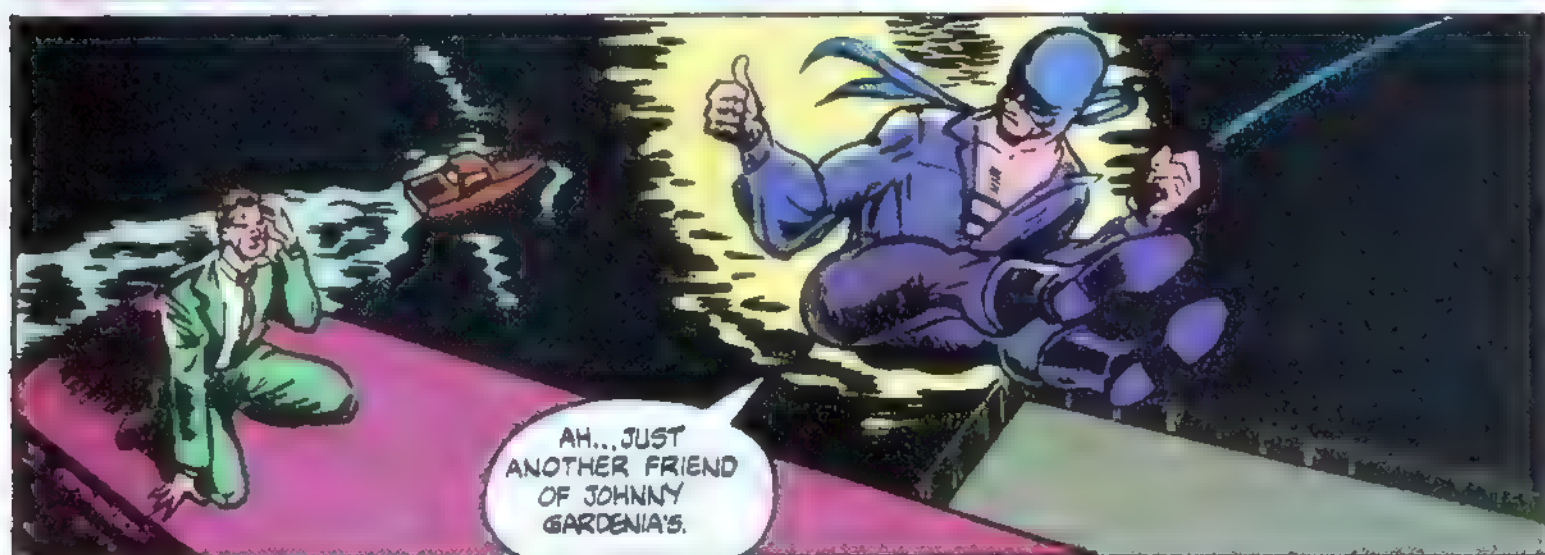
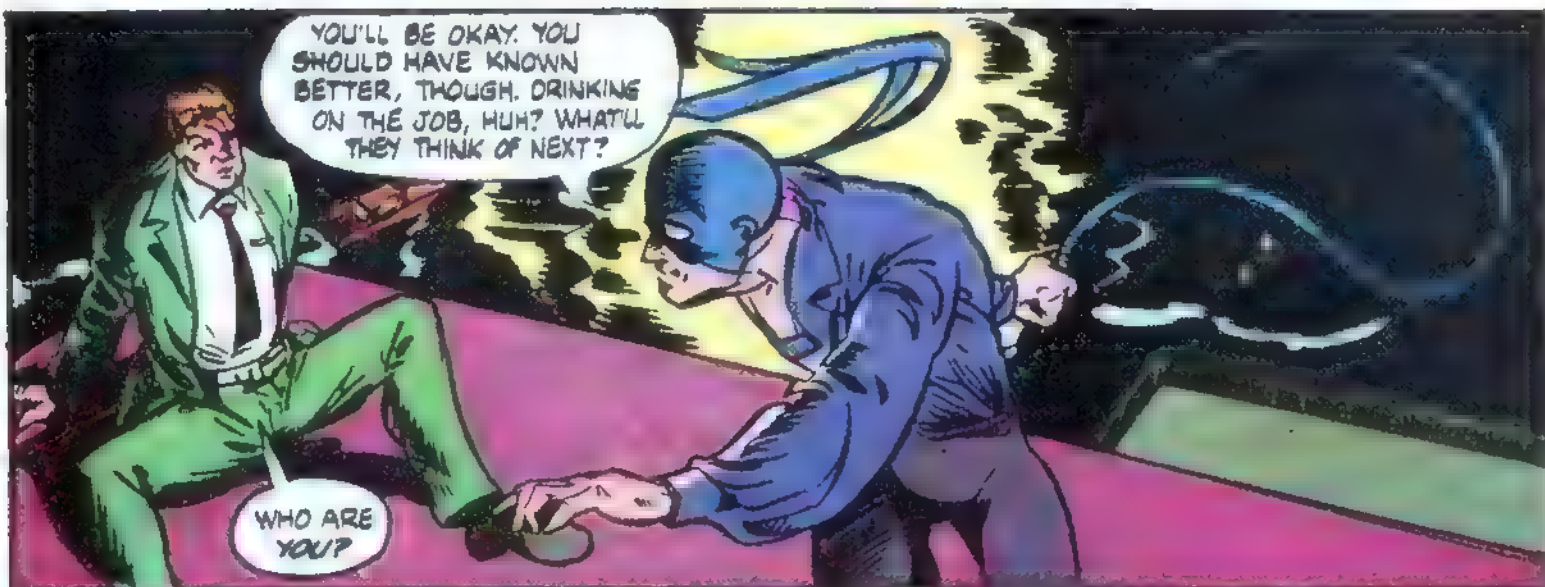
HEY! WHAT
THE HELL IS
THIS?

JOEY...JOEY!
WAKE UP AND GET
THAT GUY!









ML

"DEATH DO US PART"

TREE

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

Chapter Five

© 1983,
Max Collins
and
Terry Beatty

SOMEBODY TRIED
TO KILL ME!



MS TREE - THAT'S MOST
DISTRESSING NEWS,
CERTAINLY - BUT SURELY
YOU DON'T THINK I. ?



YOU - YOU COULD HAVE
SET ME UP, YES...
ASCERTAINED I WAS IN THE
BUILDING - LEFT FOR YOUR
PINE BEACH ALIBI -



WHY WOULD I DO
SUCH A THING ?

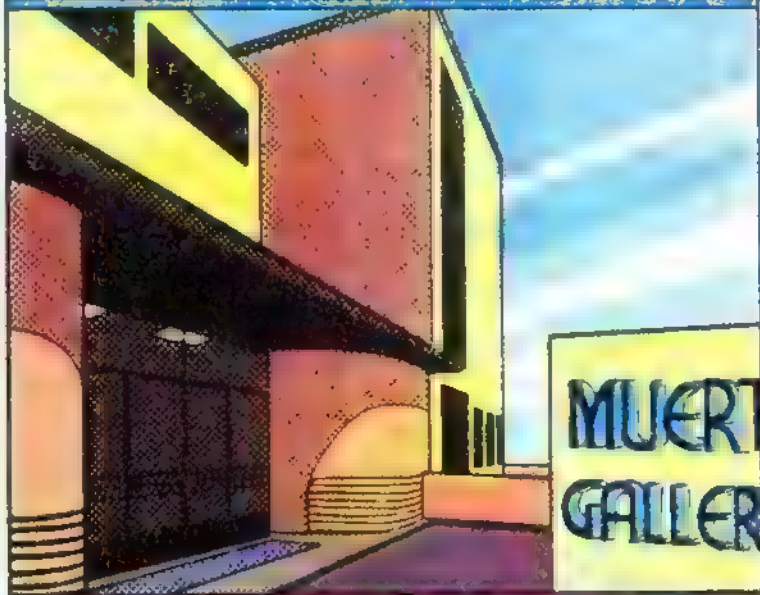
BECAUSE YOU'RE
A MUERTA.



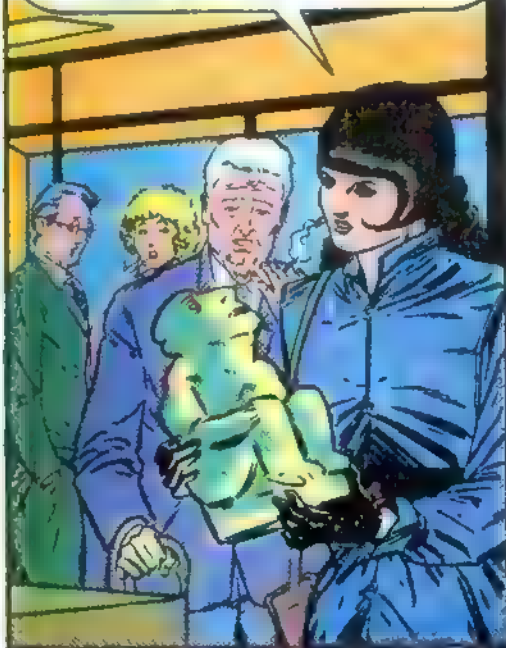
BECAUSE YOU AND YOUR BROTHER DOMINIC
KNOW I'M OUT TO GET HIM, ANY WAY I
CAN - BECAUSE YOU ONLY PRETEND TO BE
ALOOF FROM YOUR BROTHER AND HIS
BUSINESS -



"YOUR BUSINESS - THIS ART GALLERY OF
YOURS - IS A PERFECT FRONT FOR DRUG
TRAFFICKING, AFTER ALL - LIKE YOUR
BROTHER'S TRUCKING FIRM."



THIS LITTLE PIECE COMES
FROM MEXICO, FOR EXAMPLE.
GET MY DRIFT?



MS. TREE - PLEASE -
COME TO MY OFFICE -
SOME PRIVACY, PLEASE...



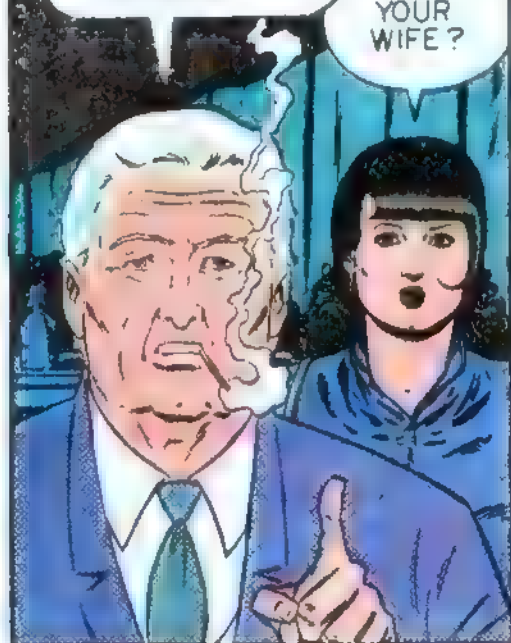
THERE'S A PAINTING IN
HERE I'D LIKE YOU TO SEE.

I'VE SEEN ENOUGH
OF THIS ERSATZ
JACKSON POLLOCK
BULLSHIT YOU CON
YOUR PATRONS
WITH.

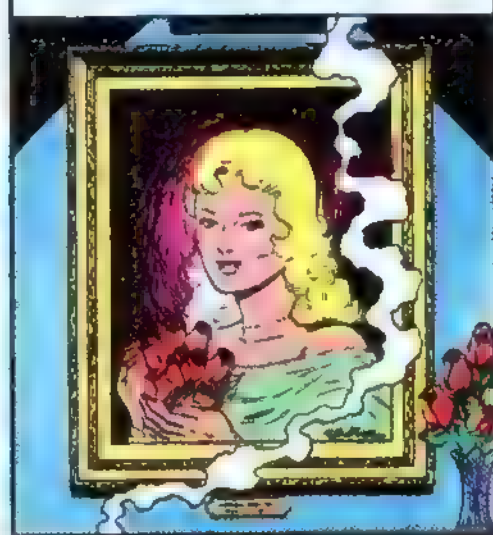


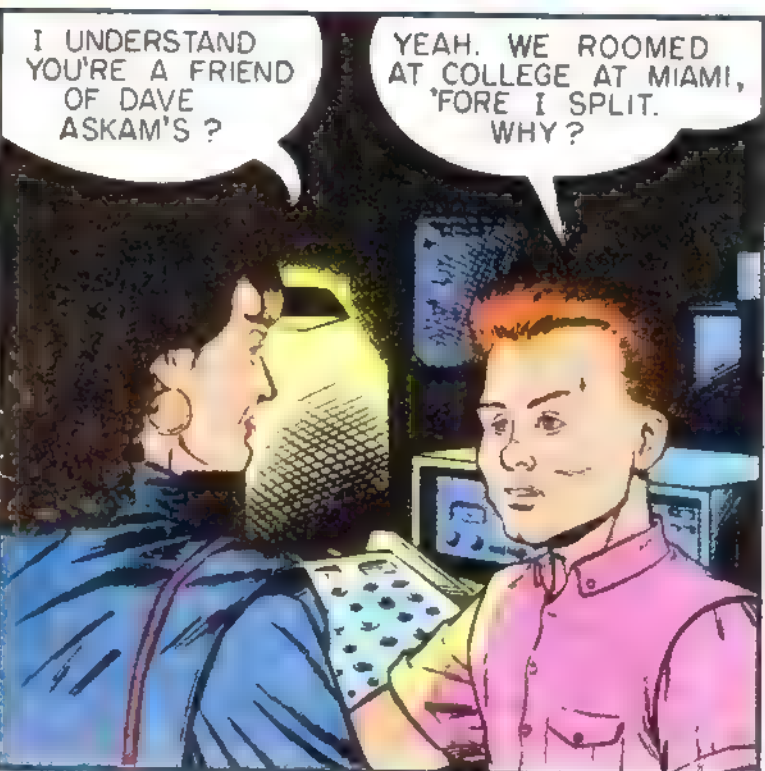
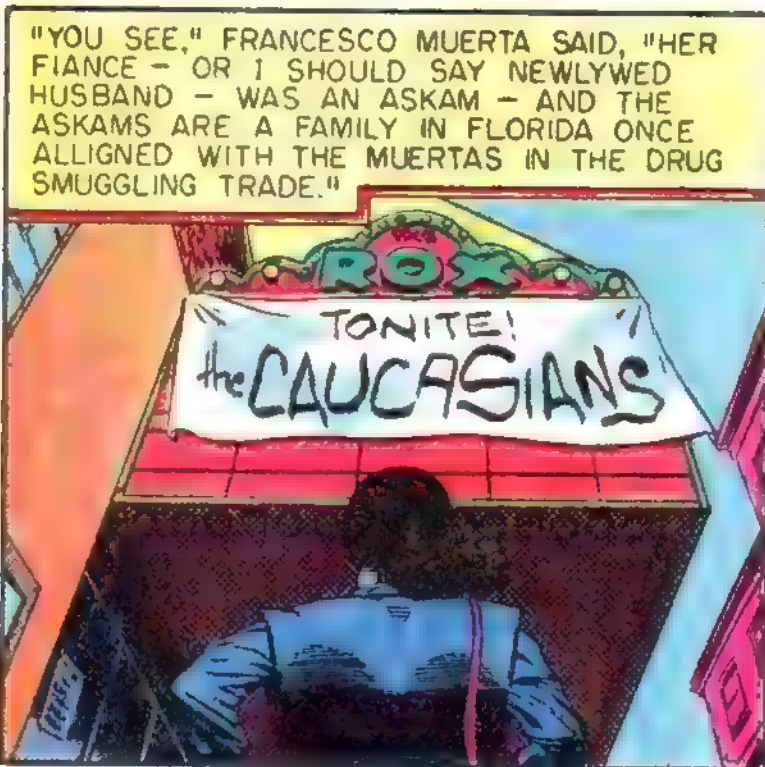
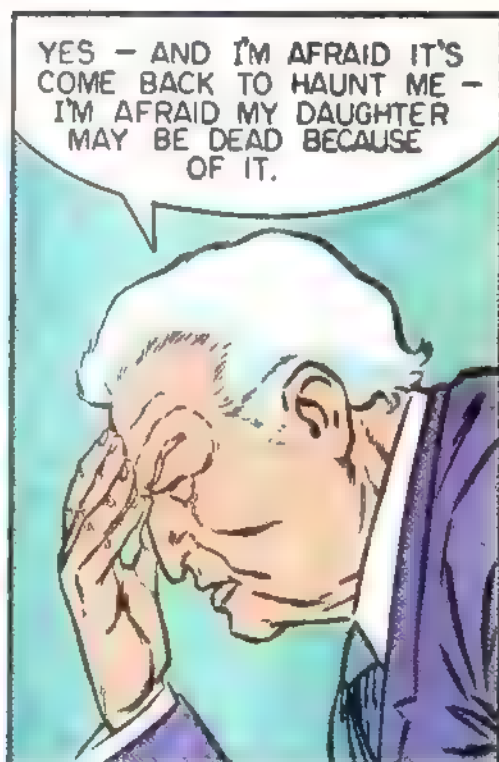
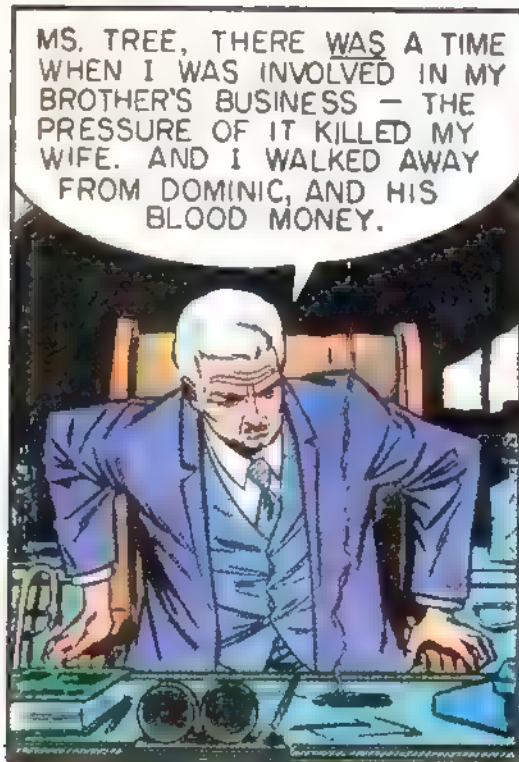
THE PAINTING I WANT YOU
TO SEE IS NOT IN THAT
CATEGORY -

YOUR
WIFE?



"YES - DEAD SOME FIFTEEN
YEARS, NOW. MY BROTHER,
INDIRECTLY, WAS RESPONSIBLE.
AS YOU CAN SEE, MY
DAUGHTER WAS THE IMAGE
OF HER MOTHER - TO HAVE
LOST THEM BOTH..."







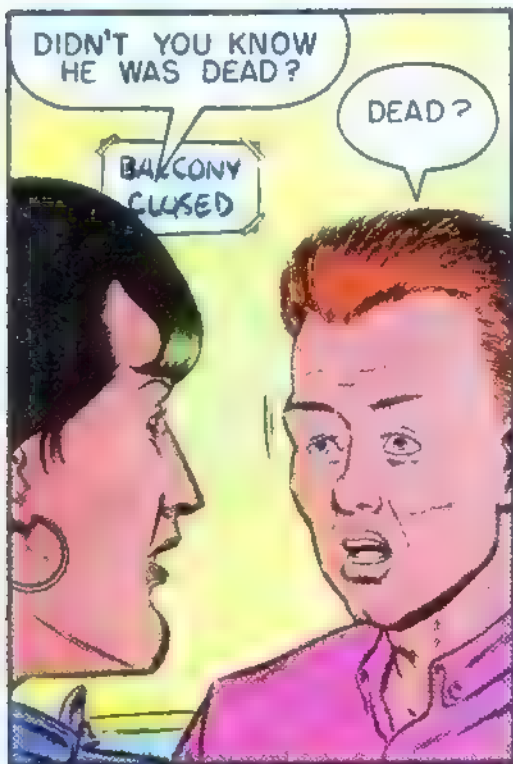
FRANCESCO MUERTA TOLD ME YOU WERE BEST MAN AT THE WEDDING OF HIS DAUGHTER AND ASKAM, TWO DAYS AGO.

THAT'S RIGHT — THEY PLANNED IT FOR WHEN I HAD A GIG IN THE CITY, SO I WAS ABLE TO STAND UP WITH DAVE. SO?



YOU KNEW HIM PRETTY WELL, I TAKE IT.

LADY, WHO THE HELL ARE YOU. WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "KNEW"?



DIDN'T YOU KNOW HE WAS DEAD?

DEAD?

BALCONY CLOSED

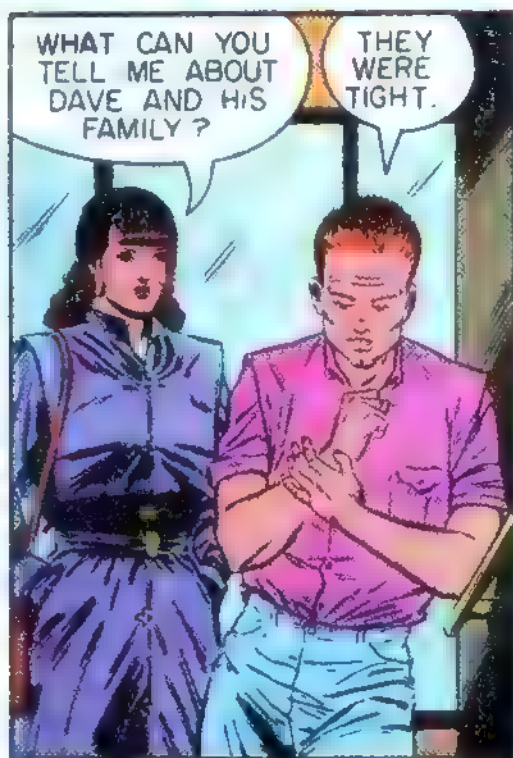


CHRIST, LADY — YOU MUST'VE TAKEN TACT LESSONS FROM JOHNNY ROTTEN —



SORRY. ASKAM AND HIS WIFE WERE MURDERED NIGHT BEFORE LAST. SHOTGUNNED.

JESUS! I THINK I'M GOING TO BE SICK —



WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT DAVE AND HIS FAMILY?

THEY WERE TIGHT.

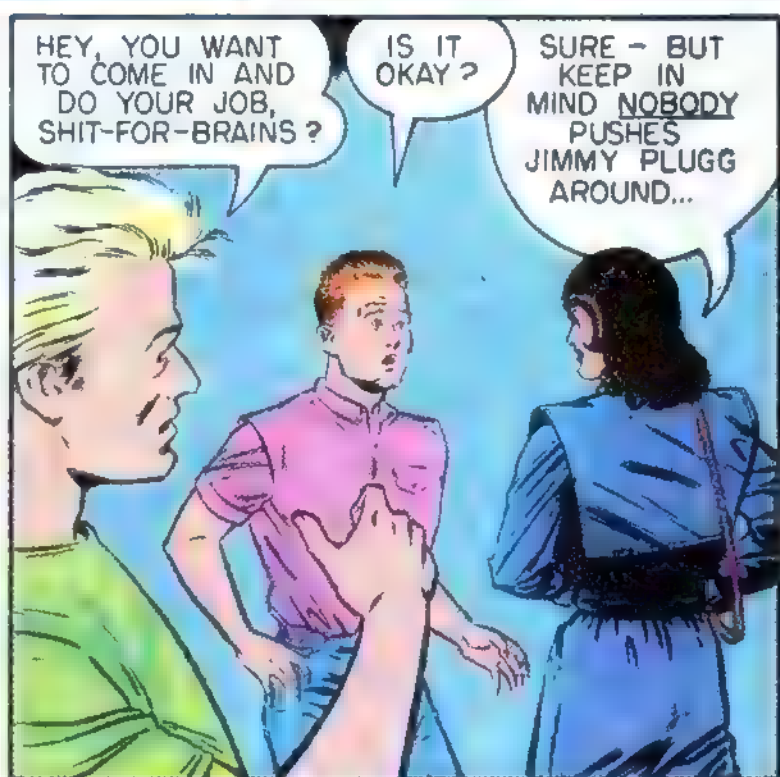
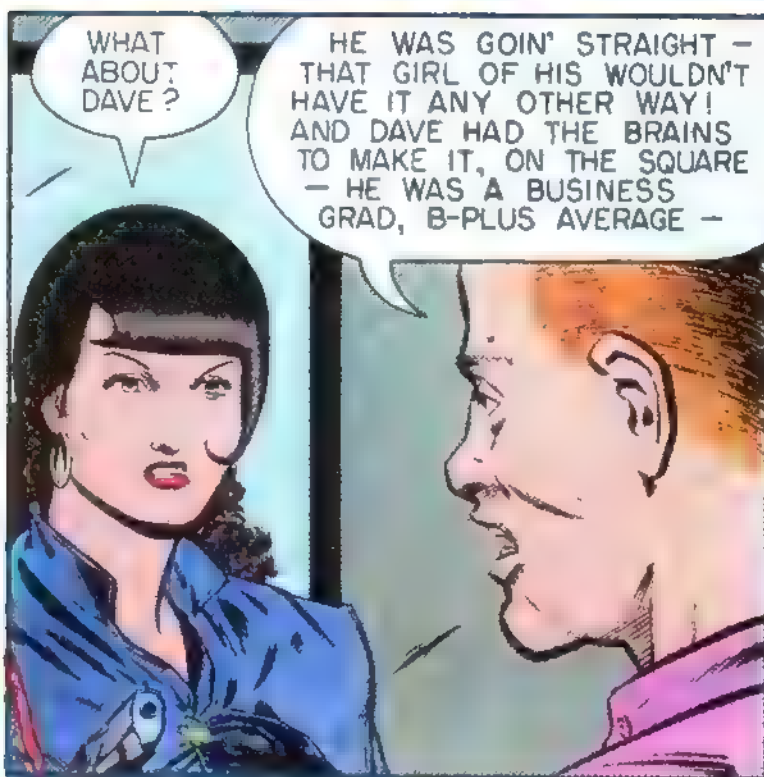
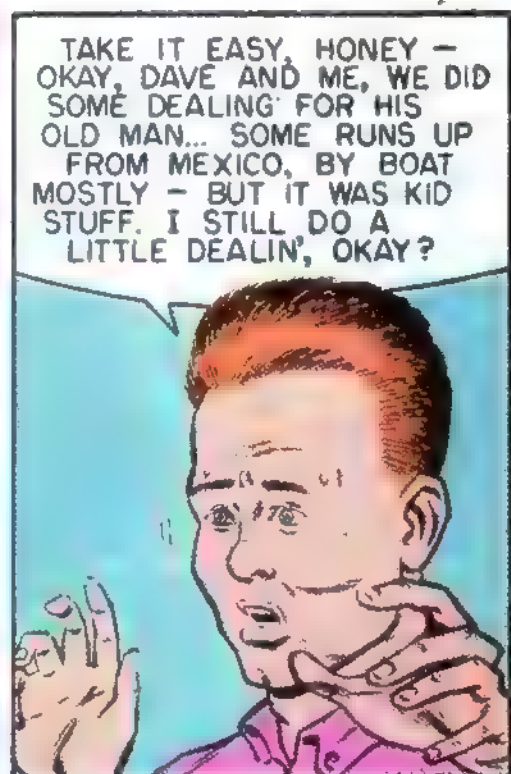
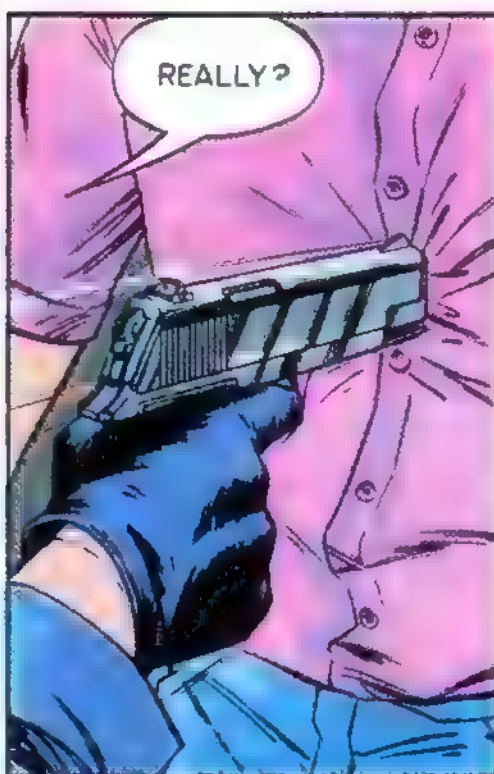


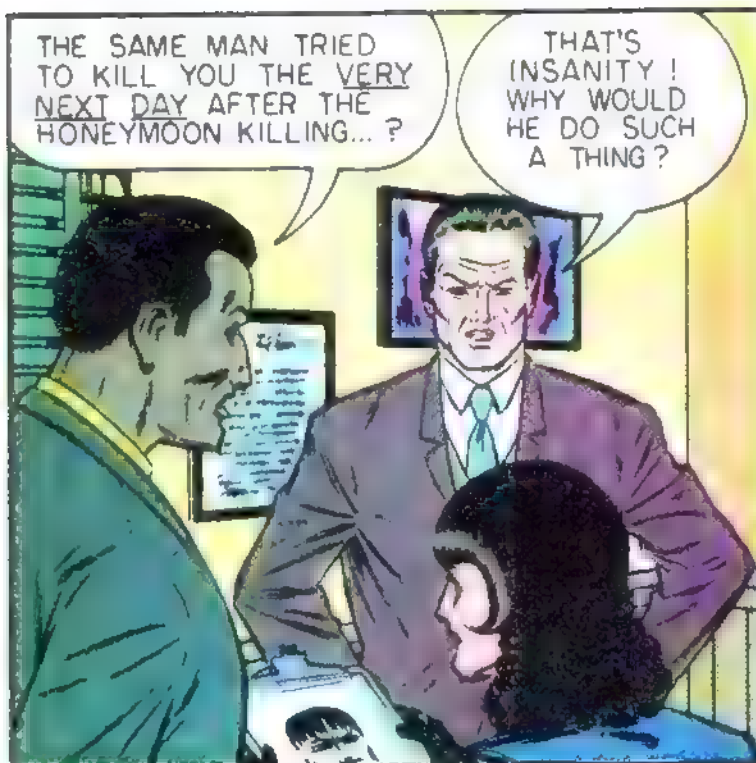
WAS DAVE GOING INTO THE FAMILY BUSINESS?



HEY, BABE — THIS IS GETTING A LITTLE HEAVY...

YOU'RE IN SHOW BIZ — MAYBE YOU'VE HEARD THE EXPRESSION "YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET —"





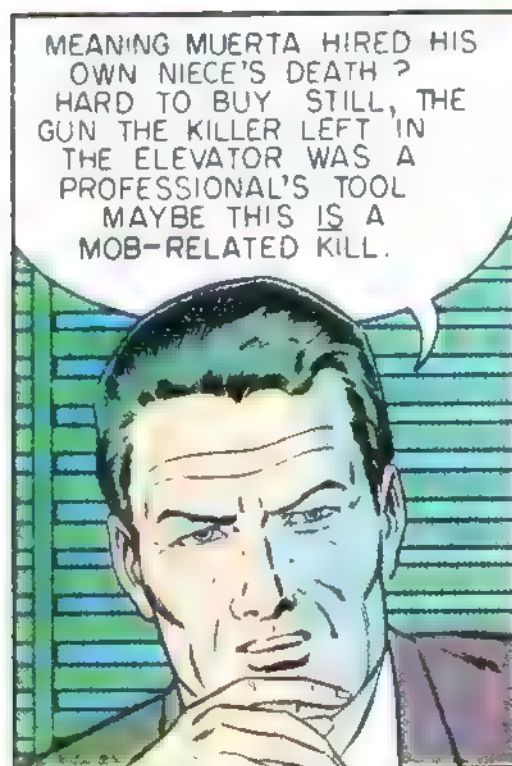
THE SAME MAN TRIED TO KILL YOU THE VERY NEXT DAY AFTER THE HONEYMOON KILLING... ?

THAT'S INSANITY ! WHY WOULD HE DO SUCH A THING ?



YOU'RE SIMPLY A BYSTANDER - A WITNESS WHO SAW NOTHING EXCEPT A KILLER-IN-DISGUISE

UNLESS HE'S IN THE HIRE OF DOMINIC MUERTA - WHO MIGHT FIGURE ME TO GET INVOLVED



MEANING MUERTA HIRED HIS OWN NIECE'S DEATH ? HARD TO BUY STILL, THE GUN THE KILLER LEFT IN THE ELEVATOR WAS A PROFESSIONAL'S TOOL MAYBE THIS IS A MOB-RELATED KILL.



A PRIVATE DETECTIVE CAN LOSE A LICENSE OVER WHAT I DID NEXT: I WITHHELD THE ASKAM INFORMATION

WELL, KEEP DIGGING, GENTS - YOU MAY COME UP WITH SOMETHING.



SEE TO IT YOU DON'T, MS TREE. YOU'RE A WITNESS IN THIS, NOTHING MORE.

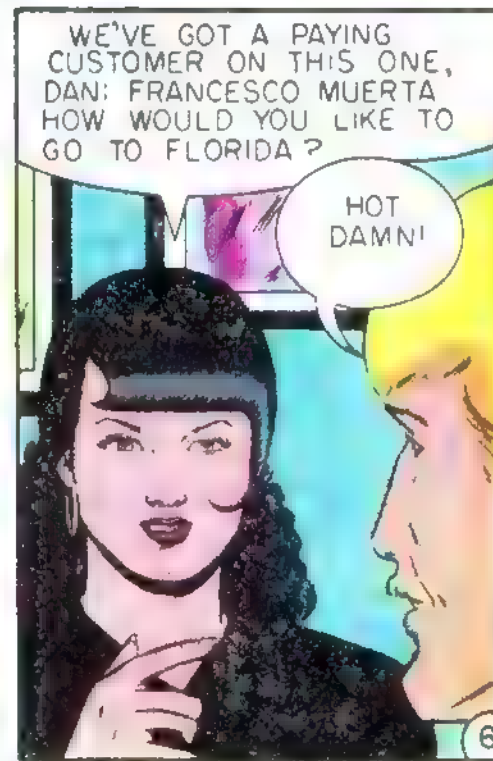
WE'LL NOTIFY YOU IF OUR NATIONAL CHECKS IDENTIFY THE HITMAN.



I SHOULD'VE TOLD THEM, OF COURSE - AND THEY'LL MAKE THE ASKAM CONNECTION THEMSELVES, SOON ENOUGH - BUT I WANTED TO RUN WITH IT, FOR A WHILE



WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME ALL THIS, MS TREE ? SINCE WHEN DO YOU LET ME IN ON YOUR CRUSADES ?



WE'VE GOT A PAYING CUSTOMER ON THIS ONE, DAN: FRANCESCO MUERTA. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO TO FLORIDA ?

HOT DAMN!

I SPENT THE REST OF THE AFTERNOON ON THE PHONE, GETTING BACKGROUND INFORMATION FROM POLICE REPORTER J.M. AYDER OF THE MIAMI HERALD -



THEN I CAUGHT UP WITH DAN, WHO WAS ALREADY AT THE AIRPORT -

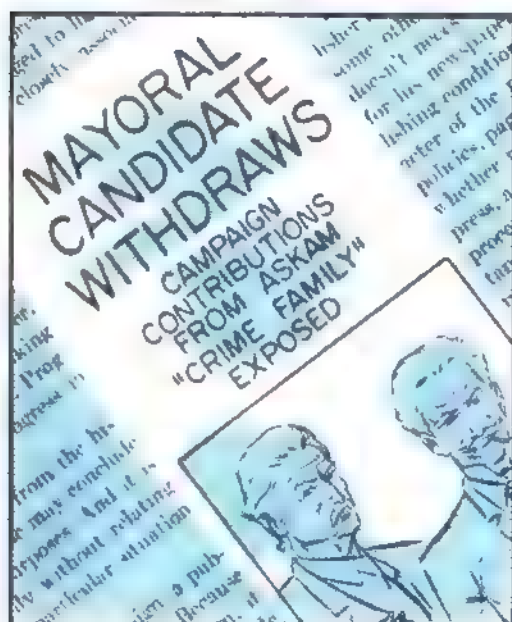
J.M.'LL FILL YOU IN, IN DETAIL, AT THE HERALD; BUT HERE'S THE BASIC OUTLINE...



"THE ASKAM BROTHERS - JOHN 'THE FOX' AND ROBERT 'THE WOLF' ASKAM - WERE AMONG DOMINIC MUERTA'S TOP DOPE SUPPLIERS THROUGHOUT THE 'SIXTIES AND 'SEVENTIES."



"BUT THE ASKAMS GOT EMBROILED IN LOCAL POLITICAL SCANDALS, AROUND '76 -"



"AND THEN A GANG WAR WITH THE EMERGING LATIN MOB FACTIONS CREATED, WELL... MUCHO BAD PUBLICITY."



AFTER WHICH, DOMINIC MUERTA APPARENTLY BROKE WITH THE ASKAMS - WHO HAVE DECLINED IN POWER ACCORDINGLY.



"LATEST DEVELOPMENT WAS LAST SUMMER, WHEN ROBERT ASKAM - DAVE'S UNCLE - WAS KILLED IN HIS OWN HOME. HOW THAT FITS IN, IF IT DOES, ISN'T KNOWN."



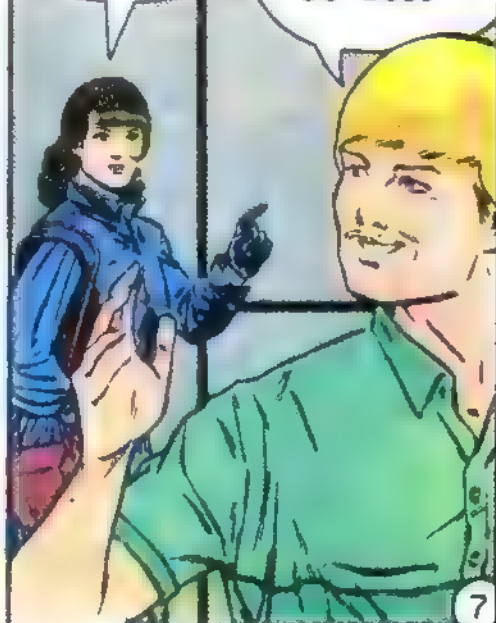
WHO DO YOU WANT ME TO TALK TO, MS. TREE?

ANYBODY IN THE ASKAM ORGANIZATION YOU CAN GET TO - JOHN ASKAM HIMSELF, IF YOU CAN PULL IT OFF.



OH, AND DAN - TRY NOT TO GET KILLED.

SEE WHAT I CAN DO BOSS -



WHEN I GOT HOME, AROUND SEVEN, THERE WAS A MESSAGE ON MY ANSWER MACHINE -

MICHAEL, THIS IS PATRICK - I'M IN TOWN, WRESTLING WITH MY PUBLISHER - STILL ON FOR TONIGHT?



PATRICK? MICHAEL. I SURE COULD USE A NIGHT OUT - BEATS OPENING UP A CAN OF SOUP AT HOME. OF COURSE I LIKE CHICAGO-STYLE PIZZA!



YOU KNOW WHAT I LIKE ABOUT TAKING YOU OUT TO DINNER?

NO, WHAT?



SINCE YOU'RE A PRIVATE EYE, AND I'M A MYSTERY WRITER, THIS IS RESEARCH - HENCE, DEDUCTABLE.



YOU KNOW, I DUG OUT ONE OF YOUR NOVELS FROM MY HUSBAND'S BOX OF PAPERBACKS.

HOPE IT WAS HITMAN #21 - THAT'S MY FINEST HOUR.

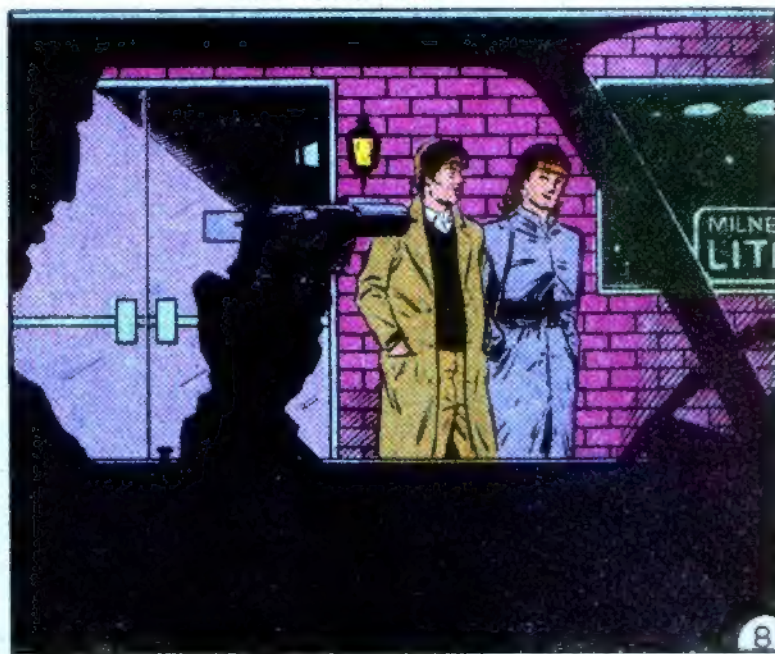


LOOK - ARE YOU DOING ALL RIGHT? I HOPE MY FLIP ATTITUDE DOESN'T SEEM CALLOUS, AFTER THAT... TRAGEDY AT PINE BEACH.

NOT AT ALL. YOU'RE JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED.



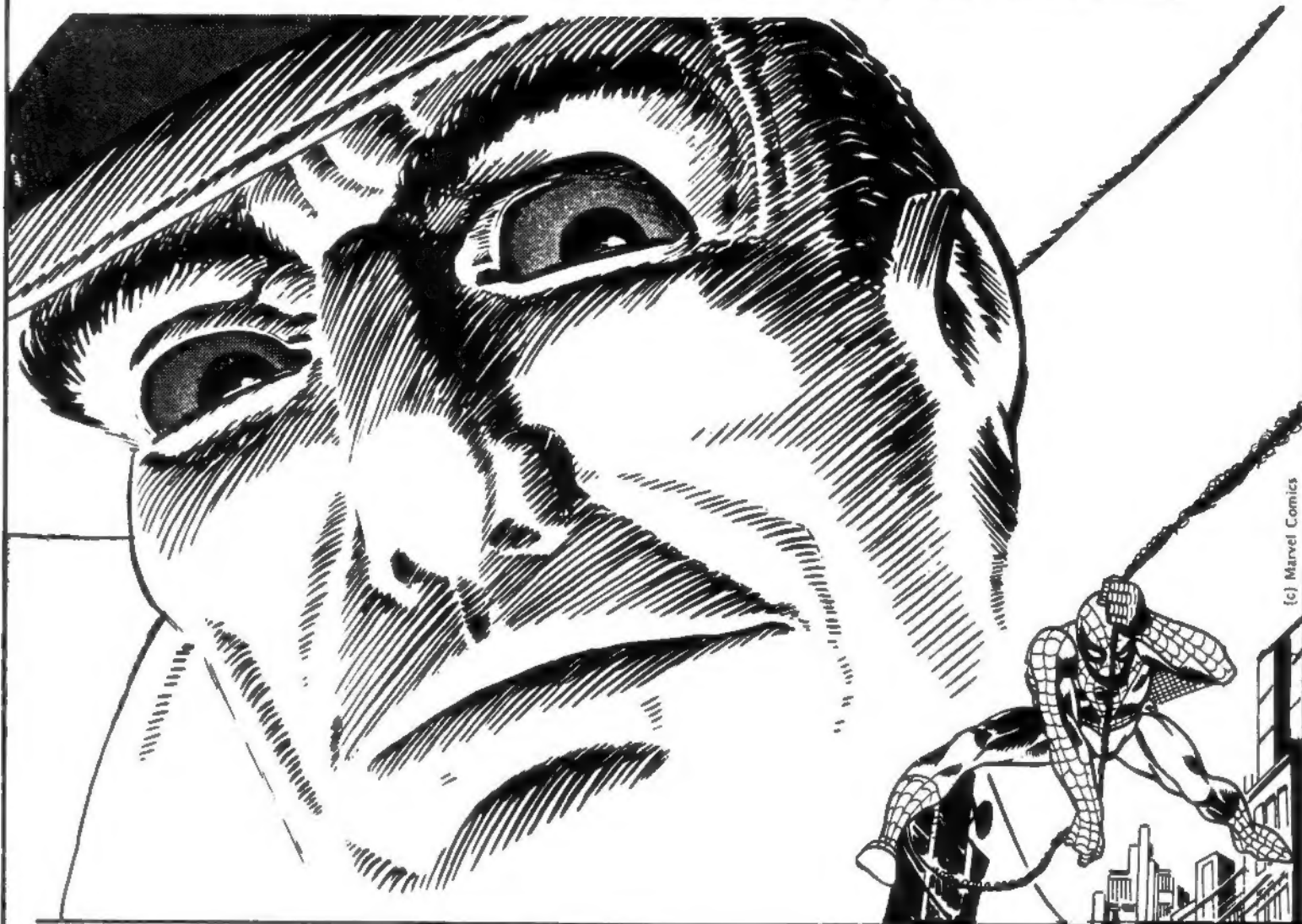
"GOOD," PATRICK SAID. "NOW, WHY DON'T WE GO SEE WHAT'S PLAYING AT YOUR APARTMENT..."



TO BE CONTINUED -

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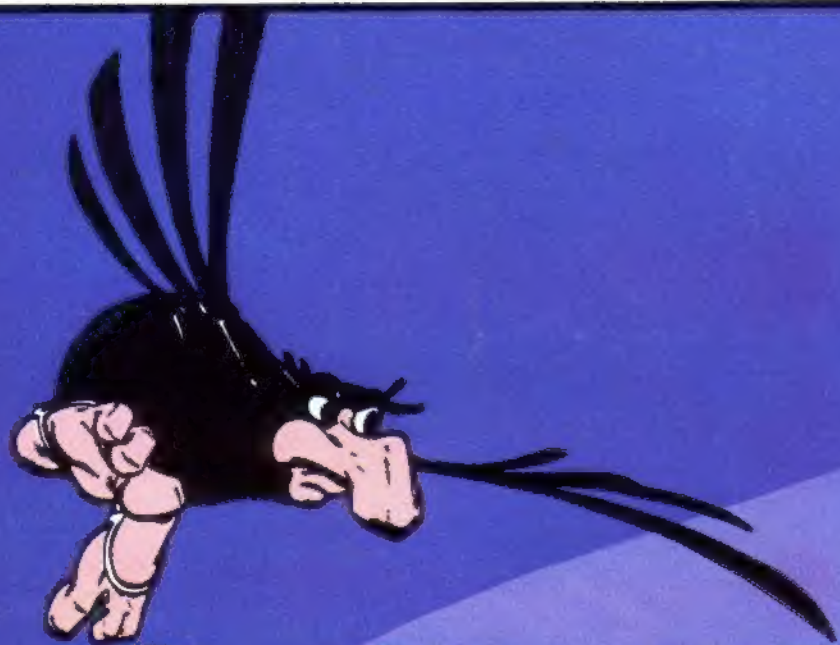
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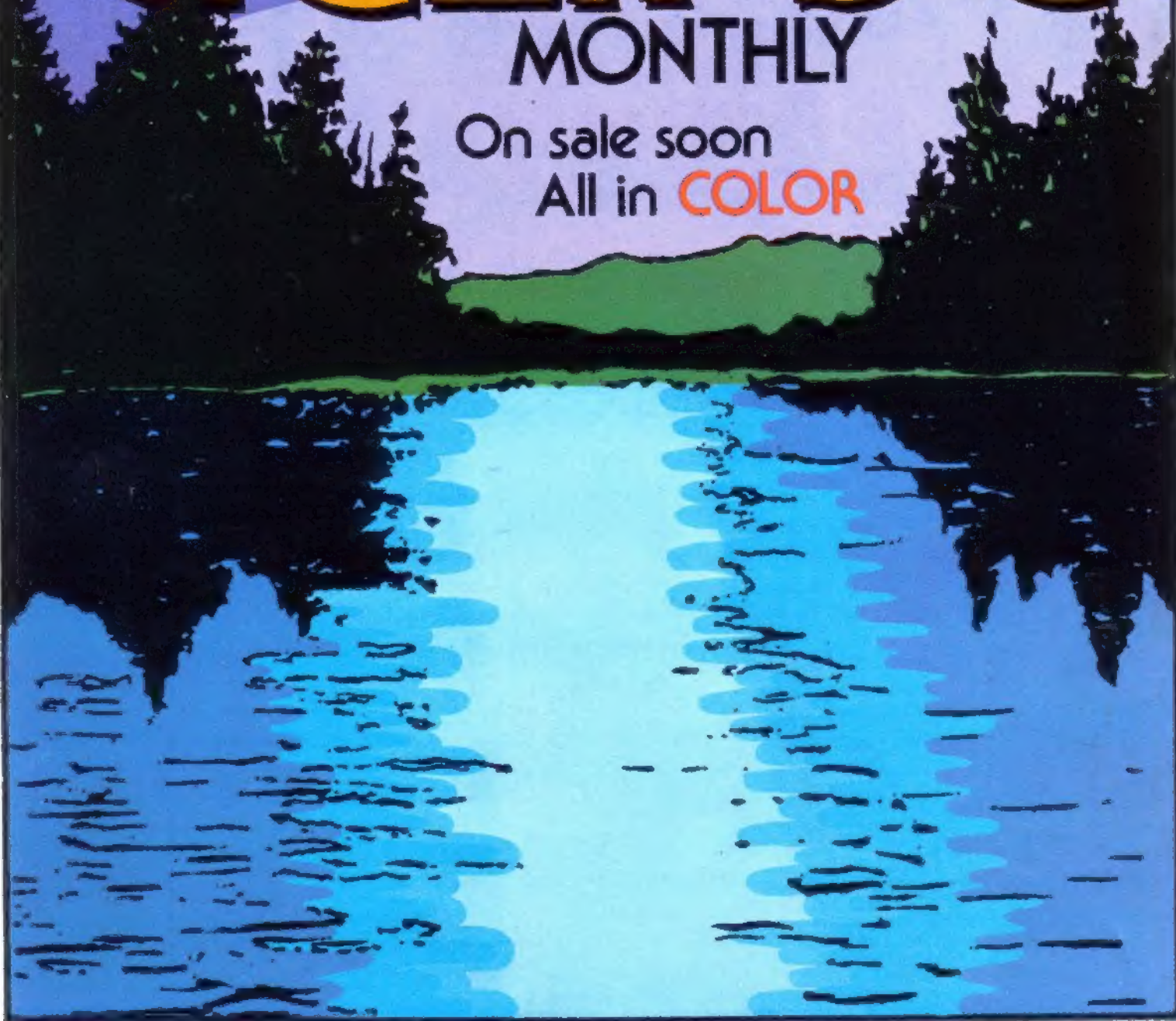
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